Reading Rubbish: Pre-apartheid to Post-apartheid South African Kitsch.

by

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this research assignment/thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date: 18 November 2009

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with kitsch as cultural phenomena, which it will approach as a specific 'aspect', or 'product' of modernity. In doing so, this thesis aims to interrogate the notion of modernity, through an analysis of kitsch. In the first place, modernity can be thought as a collection of progressive material changes, usually associated with the onset of the industrial revolution. In this sense, it is easy to establish kitsch as a typical product of modernity, as the latter literally provided the objective conditions of possibility for the production of cheap, easily reproducible industrial goods, with which kitsch is often associated. In the second place, more than a set of material changes however, modernity also entailed a concomitant series of cultural values, the rational, scientific worldview associated with the onset of the Enlightenment. The thesis will therefore also consider how kitsch can be regarded as a direct expression of these values, in as much as the characteristic falseness and conformity of kitsch might be seen as a typical product of this rational, utilitarian worldview. In the third place, modernity also refers to the combined effect of these material conditions and cultural values. Kitsch will be considered, then, also in relation to this 'life-world'. Importantly, the thesis seeks to demonstrate how the inherent contradictions of modernity become particularly apparent in kitsch.

The connection between colonialism and the Enlightenment is nothing new. Indeed, the colonial project was driven by the notion that the West was responsible for the "modernization" and "upliftment" of the rest of the world. However, the idea of modernity as a universal, ideologically neutral concept is deeply problematic. Indeed, this can also be considered as one of the contradictions inherent in modernity. By looking at South African kitsch, this thesis will examine the possibility that, as a typical product of modernity produced in a local context, it can reveal much about the manifestations or 'trajectory' of modernity outside the metropolitan centres, where it is usually located.

This will be explored by examining, on the one hand, the local 'trajectory' of the discourse of modernity, and, secondly, to the place assigned to people within the creation of these local modernities.

Opsomming

Die onderwerp van hierdie tesis is kitsch as ’n kulturele verskynsel, wat dit as volg benader. Eerstens word daar gevra of dit moontlik is om kitsch as een van die mees tipiese ‘produkte’ van moderniteit te beskou. Die bogenoemde vraagstelling maak dit dus moontlik om moderniteit te ondersoek deur ‘n analise van kitsch. In hierdie tesis, word moderniteit as volg benader: ten eerste, die materiële veranderings in terme van die produksie proses wat gewoonlik met die industriële revolusie geassosieer word; en tweedens, die rasionele, wetenskaplike, kommersiële en utilitêre lewensbeskouing ingelei deur die ‘Verligting’ (of sogenaamde *Enlightenment*) in die sewentiende eeu. Meer as net ’n versameling fisiese en filosofiese omwentelings, verwys moderniteit egter ook ten derdens na die gekombineerde impak van die bogenoemde in terme van die effek van tegnologie op kultuur, en hoe dit die menslike ‘leefwêreld’ betekenisvol beïnvloed en vervorm.

Die bogenoemde skep dus ‘n raamwerk waarbinne kitsch benader kan word. Ten eerste is dit maklik om ‘n verband tussen kitsch en tegnologiese ontwikkelinge, wat dit moontlik maak om vinnige reproduksies van ‘n lae gehalte te vervaardig, te trek. Maar soos beskou vanuit ‘n meer filosofiese perspektief, kan die valsheid en patroonmatigheid van kitsch teruggetrek word na rasioneel utilitaristies wêreldbeskouing van die ‘Verligting’, wat deur die neig na abstrakte, universele waarhede, dikwels vervlakking lei en ook spesifieke etiese gevolge het. Derdens, wanneer daar na die impak van modernisasie op die leefwêreld gekyk word, sal faktore soos die opkoms van die middelklas en sekularisasie ook in ag geneem word. Deur die bogenoemde te ondersoek, sal daar dan ook gedemonstreer word dat die teenstrydighede wat noodwendig deel vorm van die konsep van moderniteit self, in kitsch duidelik sigbaar word, juis in die manier hoe kitsch hierdie teenstrydighede probeer verberg.

Díe drie areas dan in ag geneem, is dit verder nodig om ‘n vierde definisie in te sluit om die ondersoek van moderniteit, soos dit in hierdie tesis benader word, te verdiep. Die idee dat kolonialisme en moderniteit ten diepste verbind is, is niks nuuts nie. Die gedagte dat

die Weste juis die onontwikkelde kolonies moes “ophef” en “moderniseer” was inderdaad dikwels die ideologiese beweegrede vir die koloniale projek. Maar by nadere ondersoek blyk dit onwaarskynlik dat moderniteit bloot ‘n ideologies neutrale konsep is, wat oral eenvormige resultate sou behaal. Inderdaad, laasgenoemde kan ook as een van hierdie sogenaamde “teenstrydighede” inherent tot die konsep van moderniteit beskou word. Dus, deur na kitsch te kyk wat spesifiek in ‘n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks ontstaan het, wil hierdie tesis ook die moontlik ondersoek dat plaaslike kitsch (as tipiese produk van moderniteit) ons iets meer kan vertel oor die spesifieke verloop en gevolge van hierdie sogenaamde “projek van moderniteit” binne ‘n plaaslike konteks.

Dit sal gedoen word deur die volgende twee vraagstukke aan te spreek, aan die hand van plaaslike vorme van kitsch. Eerstens sal daar aandag aan die spesifieke “verloop” en manifestasies van die diskoers van moderniteit in ‘n plaaslike konteks ondersoek word. Tweedens, gaan hierdie tesis ook aandag gee aan die spesifieke plek wat aan verskillende groepe mense binne hierdie plaaslike vorme van moderniteit toegeken word. So ‘n ondersoek sal dan op die plaaslike manifestasies van moderniteit konsentreer, om die aanname dat moderniteit oral eenvormige resultate en vooruitgang sou bereik, ongeldig te verklaar. Die idee van “moderniteit” as universele en eenvormige konsep breek dus letterlik uit mekaar, soos dit met die idee van geografiese spesifieke weergawes van moderniteit gekonfronteer word.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

According to Roger Scruton, "originality is not the same as novelty; indeed, the least original form of art is that which offers only novelty" (331). In this thesis, where the topic under investigation – kitsch – is often regarded as the very epitome of unimaginativeness, this discussion will evaluate whether or not there is indeed anything new to be gained from a collection of clichés, as I will present a reading of kitsch as a possible original enquiry into modernity. Given my position as a South African researcher, I intend, while traversing the "collective panorama of international kitsch" (Dorfles 25), to focus on kitsch produced specifically in a South African context. I am interested in establishing whether this investigation could not be deepened by examining the manner in which modernity has taken shape within a local context.

At first glance, this might appear to be a precocious proposal. In order to provide some intellectual background, I wish to introduce the following theoretical co-ordinates in order to sustain the above-mentioned statement.

Referring to Benjamin's *Arcades Project,* J.M. Coetzee observes the following:

> [w]hatever our verdict on it – ruin, failure, impossible project – [the Arcades book] suggests a new way of writing about a civilization, using its rubbish as materials rather than artworks: history from below rather than from above. And [Benjamin's] call… for a history centered on the suffering of the vanquished, rather than on the achievements of the victors, is prophetic of the way in which history-writing has begun to think of itself in our lifetime. (qtd.in Benjamin i)

Benjamin's *Arcades* involved an attempt "to represent and critique the bourgeois experience of nineteenth century history" (ii) by examining the cultural history of the arcades as a theatre for the interrogation of the ideological assumptions of the present. As

observed by Coetzee, his work involved a particular 'call for history' as a means of inquiry. Likewise, Habermas described Benjamin's work as "a philosophical discourse on and of modernity… in the form of a philosophy of historical time" (qtd. in Andrew Benjamin and Osborne xii). Significantly, Benjamin's interpretation of history involved "a reconfiguration of the way the political and the temporality of history interconnect" (Andrew Benjamin 1). Consequently, "his writings on history… sustain a radical critique of Enlightenment philosophies of time" (1). Andrew Benjamin describes the latter as follows:

> the implicit understanding of historical time in Kant's conception of the Enlightenment, for example, presupposes a gradual though inexorable move towards the realization of a specific goal. The goal in question is of course the Enlightenment and thus the move towards it interconnects time and perfectibility. As such, development becomes the formulation of progress. The goal itself is the *telos*. (1)

The problem with the above-mentioned perception of history is that it positions its presupposition as its goal. In doing so, it disguises the fact that conflict is "an inherent condition of the movement of history" (1). Within such historicism, "time becomes naturalized" and the philosophical questioning of "the time through which this development is supposed to take place" is put aside (1).

In Benjamin's work, the notion of the interruption becomes central as a means to "denature time", particularly in terms of the relationship between "interruption" and "discontinuity", but also in terms of the modern as premised on an "inaugurating interruption" (1). As described by Andrew Benjamin, "the struggle to maintain the advent of the modern has to involve a continual critical negotiation with the new and the temporality of fashion on the one hand and on the other the insistent presence of historicism's reactualization in the form of continuity and arguments for gradual development of time" (1).

Crucially, Benjamin's concern with history involves grappling with "the relationship between politics and time" (2). As Andrew Benjamin explains:

> To neglect the political or to reduce it to no more than its named presence fails to grasp that what is at stake within those writings is a political and philosophical engagement with the exigencies of the present. Part of what comprises the present, is a conflict concerning the nature of the present itself. The clash, for example, between historicism and modernity is not a question of choice. Not only is it a conflict staged between two possibilities, but the conflict is itself part of the definition of modernity. (2)

To Benjamin, modernity will therefore always remain an "unfinished project", as it is "the site of a conflict that defines the modern" (2). To him, modernity primarily involves a "complex politics of time" (2).

This is also highlighted by Calinescu, for whom modernity first and foremost implies a specific relation to "time", or indeed a specific shift in historical awareness as such (12). The notion of the "modern" of course signals the inauguration of the radically new, which defines itself insofar as it signals an absolute break with the past. Yet, at the same time, it also positions itself as the outcome, or indeed the culmination, of all that had gone before – as expressed in the notion that the "moderns" are "dwarfs on the shoulders of giants" (14). Moreover, Calinescu positions kitsch – along with the avant-garde, decadence, modernism and postmodernism – as one of the "five faces of modernity" (10). In other words, kitsch is positioned as one of a number of sites where the contradictions inherent within modernity – both as an intellectual construct and a collection of cultural assumptions – looms large.

Now, as put by Scruton, not only is kitsch often deemed "the least original form of art" (331), when considering its etymological origin – which is thought to have derived from the German word *verkitschen* (to make cheap), or *kitschen* (to collect rubbish off the street) – it seems that kitsch is also synonymous with "rubbish" or "trash" (Calinescu 234).

Although I remain wary of drawing any overt parallels between my project and Benjamin's,[4] the specific affinity I share with him can be described in the following manner. When concerned with the above-mentioned notion of modernity as a specific form of historical awareness, he often (as in the case of *The Arcades Project*) "explored these themes within the context of an analysis of the grain of everyday experience in modernity" (Caygill 2). Even though I take his perception of history as a starting point, I do not wish to position my concerns as analogous to his so much as to take up Coetzee's call for writing about culture by "using its rubbish rather than its artworks".

These definitions considered, kitsch is also often regarded as the quintessence of the banal. Setting aside, for the moment, definitions of the banal as including the vulgar and the grotesque, it is kitsch as the trite and the common-place, and as such part of 'the grain of everyday experience in modernity', that I want to call to mind. Thus I wish to evoke kitsch as having its existence in the realm of the everyday, the commonplace, expressing not only certain 'aspects' of modernity, but importantly, as the expression of a certain *sensibility*.

As stated by Sontag:

> [t]he sensibility of an era is not only its most decisive, but also its most perishable aspect. One may capture ideas (intellectual history) and the behaviour (social history) of an epoch without ever touching upon the sensibility or taste which informed those ideas, that behaviour. Rare are those historical studies…. which do tell us something about the sensibility of the period. (276)

This study will therefore be rare, in that it is more interested in the expression of a sensibility than in these 'big events'. Before I elaborate on these categories of kitsch as

[4]With this I refer to the manner in which his philosophy attempts to embrace the 'totality of experience' in an attempt to uncover the 'true history' beneath the ideological mask (Benjamin and Osborne xi). I remain wary of aligning myself to his approach to objects, which he believed contained as a microcosm, the 'totality' – the distilled 'essence' – of an era, which once retrieved, will allow its 'truth' to shine through (xi). The theoretical perspectives of this thesis, on the contrary, are premised on the very impossibility of such a position, through its later contextualizing of the object within the unstable processes of signification by which linguistic and cultural meaning is produced in Chapter Six.

both a certain characteristically modern sensibility as well as one of the most typical 'products' or 'aspects' of modernity, however, there is one more important point on which my analysis will turn. Kraniauskus observes that there is something missing in a "political geography" of Benjamin's enquiry of modernity (143). He cites Adorno's critique of Benjamin's project, who was of the opinion that the commodity category on which Benjamin based his investigation "could be greatly concretized by the specifically modern categories of *world trade* and imperialism" (qtd. in Kraniauskus 143).

When concerned with the "temporal structure of modernity that narrativizes history in terms of a master concept of 'progress'", Kraniauskus elaborates by stating that "on a global stage [this] entails the idea of 'the non-contemporaneousness of geographically diverse but chronologically simultaneous times'" (150). Accordingly, "the colonial is located in another, non-contemporary time that, by definition, is not present" (150) and therefore does not exist. "Encoded and disavowed according to the historically specific intertwining logics of aesthetics, psychology and ethnography, colonialism remains unconscious" – literally as the underground of the Enlightenment modernity (150-151).

To clarify the above-mentioned, Kraniauskus relates the following dream of Benjamin's. Set at the market-place in Weimar, where some excavations were taking place, Benjamin found himself participating in the digging when he suddenly unearthed a church-steeple, thinking to himself that he had just unearthed a pre-animistic Mexican shrine. Kraniauskus maintains that this mistaken identity represents "a joke on the market-place of Enlightened Europe… enslaved to fetishism (of the commodity) and myth (of the new) … [whose roots] are to be found in '*primitive*' accumulation and *colonial* exploitation" (150).

As such, Adorno maintains, the colonial remains silent in the work of Benjamin, who does not take into account how the designation of these "non-existent zones" within the temporal fabric of modernity is indeed itself part of the political negotiation of the present (qtd. in Kraniauskus 143). Benjamin, therefore, does not involve himself in the international dimensions of modernity suggested by Kraniauskus's critique – the

geographical contextualization of which "must be modified so as to take it beyond Europe" (143).[5] Indeed, the idea that imperialism and colonialism, as an expansion of modern capitalism, are part and parcel of the legacy of the Enlightenment is not novel.

Having stated my intention of reading kitsch as a specific 'aspect' of modernity, the above-mentioned becomes important regarding the contextualization of my study as an enquiry into South African kitsch. As stated in the beginning of this chapter, this thesis is concerned with the global reaches of modernity. Considering these global reaches of modernity, it should be noted that it is beyond the scope of this thesis to embrace its full scale. Indeed, to attempt a post-colonial revision of the project of modernity through the lens of kitsch (from its metropolitan to its most peripheral manifestations, as one of modernity's most typical products), would be a virtually impossible project, and such an attempt would most likely fail. Nor do I believe that the complexity of any epoch could ever be fully expounded, and, as such, remain wary of a project on a scale as grand and as all-encompassing as the above-mentioned would imply. By focusing on kitsch produced within a South African context, however, I will attempt to make an inroad into the above-mentioned concerns. I aim to approach local forms of kitsch with an emphasis on "placedness" or "positionality" in order to create a sense of dialogue between "local" and "global", that signals what Hofmeyer refers to as a "geocultural consciousness – a sense of speaking from outside or inside or both at once" (4). My study, considered from these co-ordinates, aims at an analysis of cultural phenomena that regards them in terms of their position within a global field of cultural production and networks of power.

As stated by John and Jean Comaroff, "our grasp of global modernity is still rather limited, often rather unspecific" (xi). In addressing the latter, Diouf specifies that there are "two important issues" at stake in considering the development of colonial modernities: "the interpretation of manifestations of modernity in the process of imperial expansion, on the one hand", and the place assigned to the various groups of individuals

[5]Nor can this be said to take place in the work of Adorno (143). This Kraniauskus attributes to the context of the Frankfurt School, referring to "Imperial – and recently unified Germany - in which nationhood and colonialism mutually reinforced each other in the dominant ruling imaginary" (143). Thus, despite its pioneering work with regards to culture studies (which in large part informs this study), it has become crucial to reposition these insights within a postcolonial perspective.

at play within these modernities, on the other (par. 5). If kitsch can then be demonstrated to be a typical product of modernity – considering the kitsch produced by a South African context specifically – I will examine the course or 'trajectory' of modernity within a local context, as well as the place assigned to people within these specific manifestations of 'modernity', through an analysis of local examples.

As in the case of compiling an inventory of the global reaches of kitsch, it would be tempting to aim at a comprehensive list of local kitsch, past and present, but this, too, would be impossible, not least because of South Africa's diverse cultural groupings, which would entail an inventory of the countless types of kitsch specific to these groups. Keeping in mind the earlier definition of modernity – as a specific temporal relation in which the present takes shape through the struggle over the very definition of the present – the course of modernity within a local context, as well as the place assigned to people within the latter, will be examined with reference to the negotiation of the modern in terms of strictly local political struggles. By examining the kitsch produced within these local political struggles, rooted in their geographical specificities, while at the same time embedded in a network shaped by 'world trade' and 'imperialism', shatters the notion of modernity as a universal category that could yield similar results across a range of diverse geographical locations.[6] The notion of modernity is compromised, in terms of the supposed linear logic of progress, by demonstrating the unevenness of these developments – in short, by sustaining a critique of the Enlightenment philosophies of time.

The focus of this thesis will therefore be on the types of kitsch produced by these dominant regimes. This will include the kitsch produced by the Apartheid state in its attempts to consolidate itself. As my focus on kitsch aims, not only to illustrate the ideas or grand events which defined an era, but also the sensibility underlying these, it will

[6]As observed by Diouf, such a perspective – relying on "an abundance of qualifications that result from opposing the idea of modernity as a strictly European development and affirming it as a multivalent phenomenon" – is gaining increasing valence in postcolonial studies, although this is "notably more apparent in studies on India and China than those on Africa" (par. 1). In outlining the theoretical and "geographical" location of this thesis, by focusing on South African kitsch, I will also make an attempt to address this lacuna.

include the articulation of this sensibility in the choices of ordinary individuals. This will mostly refer to Afrikaner kitsch. But finally, when coming to a post-apartheid, or 'postmodern' context, this will also come to bear on renegotiations of Afrikaner kitsch as a means to forge new political identities, as well as the rise of new forms of kitsch as a means of 'laying claim' to the present by the new political regime. This will of course refer to 'Rainbow Nation' kitsch. Although these types of kitsch were or are certainly not the only types of local kitsch existing at the time, it would disperse the focus too widely, considering the scope of this dissertation, to include a full overview of all the various forms of kitsch that coexist within this space.

Having sketched the broader framework or 'reaches' of this thesis in terms of these apprehensions regarding modernity, as well of the study of kitsch in a South African context, I will now proceed by outlining the proposed framework by means of which the above-mentioned concerns are to be addressed. Having stated these overarching concerns in the introduction, the thesis will proceed by considering existing theories on kitsch (Chapter Two). By considering the question of periodization and its characteristic elements, it will elaborate on the contestation of kitsch as a specific product of modernity. Having established this theoretical frame, I will proceed to the contextualization of kitsch within a South African context. This will take place over the following 'periodizations': Pre-Apartheid to Apartheid (Chapter Three), Apartheid (Chapter Four), and Post-Apartheid kitsch (Chapter Five).

This ordering of the subject matter might seem to introduce the sense of neat linear development, assuming that its "object of knowledge… unfolded over time in a slow, orderly manner… confident that 'it' was the same thing, albeit changed with time, at the beginning and the end of the story" eschewed earlier in the argument (Errington xxv). This is not the case, however, as I will shortly demonstrate. Considering Foucault, whose writing "more than anyone else's destroyed the legitimacy of that [linear] mode of writing", I do not aim to treat kitsch as "a timeless category existing in the abstract world of ideas and essences" but as "a constructed category that appeared at a certain moment" (xxv). As Errington argues, this category did not "remain stable once it was invented:

both the semantic field in which the term exists and the objects gathered under its rubric changed over time and varied across contexts" (xxv).

Accordingly, although I refer to these 'periodizations' in order to create a sense of the trajectory of kitsch (and of modernity) in a local context, I would like to refer back to Benjamin's ideas of origin and development. As explained by Didi-Huberman, origin "does not in any way designate something remaining 'upstream' from things, as a source of the river is upstream from it", but "names 'that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance', not the source, but a whirlpool in a river of becoming [that] pulls the emerging matter into its own rhythm" (4). In this sense, decline would also be understood "not as the bygone – albeit founding – past, but the precarious, churning rhythm, the dynamic two-way flow of historicity that asks, without respite, even to our own present, 'to be recognized as a restoration, a restitution, and as something that by that very fact that is always uncompleted, always open'" (4). Considering, then, the specific approach to history as contested present that guides the historiographical aspect of this project, the periodisations in question do not so much serve as a historical index, as allow for the possibility of a discussion of kitsch across a broad range of possible examples or contexts.

Once kitsch is established as a particular product of modernity in Chapter Two, it will be discussed with reference to the following notions intrinsic to such a conception. The idea of the modern myth will be explored in Chapter Three, which is concerned with the political kitsch born from the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism during the pre-apartheid to apartheid period. Modern nostalgia will be considered in Chapter Four, by looking at how sensibilities underlying the perturbations of the political sphere were articulated within the intimate sphere of the modern home during the apartheid era. Lastly, the interrogation of modernity within a postmodern context will be looked at in Chapter Five, which considers the notion of 'recycled' or 'ironic' kitsch in the present post-apartheid period.

To explain the focus of the main chapters in more detail, I will look at each of them in turn. Chapter Three will consider the particular manifestations of kitsch during the 1930s and 1940s, which saw the inception of Afrikaner nationalism. Taking political kitsch as its focus, it will explore these in relation to the ideologies and rituals of nationalism, centering around the *Tweede Trek* and the inauguration of the Voortrekker monument. This will be done by focusing particularly on the workings of the 'kitsch myth' in the construction of the notion of *Afrikaner volk* and the invention of the nation. Nevertheless, as opposed to considering the grand discourses of the political sphere exclusively, I will expand the focus to how these often became incarnated in the most mundane objects. For although political kitsch is an important category – and even if all kitsch per se could be considered ideological – I wish to highlight that kitsch is not simply to be equated to the workings of a specific political ideology exclusively.

Chapter Four will elaborate upon this shift away from the public to the private. In considering apartheid kitsch, the modern suburban home will be treated as the crucible in which the sensibilities underlying the apartheid era are expressed. This will be done by looking at kitsch in the form of the uniform characteristics of the modern home's structural façade and interior, as well as the values expressed through the collection of objects the home comes to 'house'. The latter will be read in the broader context of the idea of modern nostalgia which, with the onset of modernity, characterizes the longing for an earlier 'lost home' or more 'authentic' form of existence. Moreover, it will be examined how modern nostalgia gives rise to a fetishization of the 'natural' or the 'authentic'. In this chapter the modern home will be treated as the site where this negotiation between authenticity and inauthenticity is played out, often giving rise to myriad examples of kitsch.

Chapter Four will also contain a more in-depth analysis of who is considered to be 'at home' within modernity and who is not. Generally speaking, this will come to bear on the invention of the 'primitive' or the exotic, which will be demonstrated as lying at the heart of this hankering after the authentic. More than a mere longing for more 'authentic' forms of existence, however, the latter will be demonstrated as an acute strategy of

power, keeping racial others locked in a discursive frame which locates them beyond modernity. This not only legitimates the colonial 'civilizing mission' but also endorses colonial rule, as these 'primitives' are not regarded as capable of sustaining modern forms of government. Crucially, it will be considered how the values expressed in the forms of kitsch examined also deeply entrenched notions of whiteness. At the hand of these examples, it will thus be demonstrated how the modern Afrikaner family home becomes an over-determined site for guarding racial purity, firstly, in terms of its actual physical location – that of the white suburbs cordoned off by the Group Areas Act – but in addition, this is mirrored in the way in which its actual inhabitants – the white Afrikaner family – are positioned as a bulwark against racial miscegenation.

Finally, Chapter Five, which looks at post-apartheid kitsch, introduces a timeframe contemporaneous with that of postmodernity, which involves, in large part, the deconstruction of the conceptions of modernity as discussed in relation to kitsch thus far (and as indeed expressed by it). The onset of the so-called condition of postmodernity by no means signals the 'death of kitsch', as one might expect. While the notion of postmodernity might seem to suggest an interruption as discussed in relation to Benjamin, although the notion of the interruption is central, it is nevertheless, as pointed out by Andrew Benjamin, "far from absolute" (1). For "[n]ot only do vestiges of earlier configurations remain", but as in the case of modernity, where "the advent of the modern" is maintained through the continued negotiation between the old and the new (1), postmodernism, too, signals a critical break with the assumptions of modernity yet remains inextricably tied to these, as indeed, by recasting these assumptions, it stays in dialogue with them.

Thus, Chapter Five reaches a cross-roads as far as a discussion of kitsch is concerned. On the one hand, I will examine the phenomenon of kitsch 'redeemed' or kitsch used, that is, in a manner that signals an ironic self-awareness (and, as such, engaged in the deconstruction of certain conceptions in a characteristically postmodern manner). I will consider the phenomena of 'recycled Boerekitsch' through a discussion of *Voëlvry* and *Evita se Perron* in Darling, as well as refer to the notion of Retro as a specific type of

relationship with the past (or modernity). On the other hand, kitsch is far from dead, as a discussion on the phenomenon of post-apartheid kitsch will demonstrate. Indeed, one could well argue that there is a category such as post-apartheid kitsch. I will discuss this in terms of 'Rainbow Romanticism' and 'Madiba kitsch'. Furthermore, I will relate these to Baudrillard's notion of the simulation and the increasing promiscuity of the sign in a post-industrial context.

Having described, then, the course of my theoretical trajectory across these three chapters, I wish to add that it will follow these periodizations of pre-apartheid, apartheid, and post-apartheid more or less loosely. For, at this point, I will also have to introduce a certain sense of anachronism to these chapters, as they might be interspersed at times with objects which in some respects do not follow the rules of periodization, strictly speaking. In the end, the main goal of this thesis is not to have produced a work that reads like an inventory of classified objects in a museum catalogue, but one that resembles a bric-a-brac shop, where objects are placed in strange juxtapositions to each other. Ultimately, the dialogue between past and present will be generated by the objects themselves, which will start speaking to each other in interesting ways.

Accordingly, some chapters may contain references to 'the relics of a previous age', or some objects may time-travel from the future in order to facilitate this conversation. But what I hope to achieve is a sense of these strands being tightly woven together, as ultimately good 'curating' involves organizing the exhibition space in such a manner that objects can speak for themselves. In this sense, I see myself as occupying a curious position between curator and collector, archivist and satirist, one that is further complicated by the fact that I have no actual 'exhibition space' in which to arrange these objects, save for a mental one. My arena is in the abstract, which we now will enter.

CHAPTER TWO

Kitsch

An attempt at 'snaring a sensibility in words'

Kitsch is a vexed subject, and an attempt at providing a formal definition for what Calinescu has termed "one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics" (226) is not an easy task. Adorno has attributed to kitsch a quality of being "fickle, like an imp, [which] defies definition" (qtd. in Calinescu 339). Certainly, what confronts anyone as soon as they engage with the topic is that the very slipperiness of the term makes it difficult to discuss kitsch, for it might indeed seem as if one is "falling short of an objective to talk about" (225). To be sure, it is easy enough to think of kitsch items and to "criticize their faults either kindly or mercilessly", yet once these have to be worked into a theoretical framework and assigned an existence in the world, it seems as if one is brought to the edge of an "ontological abyss" in which almost everything and nothing at all can appear to be kitsch (Giez 156).

A discussion of kitsch is often located in the domain of aesthetics. The latter can be defined as "the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of art and the criteria of artistic judgment", especially the establishment of "the meaning and validity of these judgments, and the principles underlying or justifying such judgments" (The Columbia Encyclopedia par. 1). As such, it is concerned with ideas of 'taste' and 'value'. In this sense, therefore, kitsch can be regarded as the expression of a certain *sensibility*, and as 'bad taste' in particular. When it comes to the discussion of a sensibility, Sontag has observed the following:

> [Even if one is] speaking about a sensibility only… these are grave matters. Most people think of sensibility or taste as the realm of purely subjective preferences, those mysterious attractions, mainly sensual, that have not been brought under the sovereignty of reason. They *allow* that considerations of taste play a part in their reactions to people

> and to works of art. But this attitude is naïve. And even worse. To patronize the faculty of taste, is to patronize oneself. For taste governs every free – as opposed to rote – human response. Nothing is more decisive. (276)

This certainly emphasizes the importance of (and lends credibility to) the decision to explore an era not only in terms of its grand events, but also in terms of the sensibilities underlying these. However, working with a sensibility also introduces a certain methodology: "Taste", says Sontag, "has no system and no proofs", but there is nevertheless "something like a logic of taste: the consistent sensibility which underlies and gives rise to certain tastes" (276). Yet, when trying to draw attention to this underlying consistency, one has to keep the following in mind:

> [a] sensibility is almost, but not quite, ineffable. Any sensibility which can be crammed into the mold of a system, or handled with the rough tools of proofs, is no longer a sensibility at all. It has hardened into an idea. (276)

Thus, Sontag concludes, "in order to snare a sensibility in words, especially one that is alive and powerful, one must be tentative and nimble" (276). Accordingly, "[t]he form of jottings, rather than an essay (with its claim to a linear, consecutive argument)", seems more appropriate for getting down something as "particular and fugitive as a sensibility" (276).

I share Sontag's reservations in attempting to walk the tightrope between providing some theoretical insight into kitsch while steering clear of letting these observations coagulate into 'hardened ideas'. Rather than offer a grand, all-embracing definition, I aim to provide a series of perspectives from which kitsch might be approached. Referring back to the previous chapter, to the notion of various objects in conversation with each other, this chapter, too, aims to facilitate a conversation, but, in this case, between the various voices in the debate on kitsch. Despite the introduction of various perspectives, these are nevertheless aimed at illustrating an underlying 'logic of taste', or a 'consistent sensibility' which gives rise to kitsch. The latter, then, will provide the theoretical

framework from which the objects considered in the subsequent chapters are to be assessed.

This underlying 'logic' or point of organization is of course that of kitsch as a specific 'aspect', 'product', or 'concomitant' of modernity. I will start by addressing this rubric, as put forth in the introductory chapter. In this sense, this thesis can be considered to be located within debates in which modernity "designates a combined [material], aesthetic, ethical and political outlook, unified in eighteenth century thought, but splintered in the subsequent development of Western societies" (Brooker 125). As pointed out by Zimmerman, modernity has the following inter-related meanings: "first, the techniques, devices, systems and production processes usually associated with *industrialism*; second, the rationalist, scientific, commercialist and utilitarian, anthropocentric, secular worldview usually associated with *modernity*"; third, the combined effects of the latter on the human "life-world" in terms of the organization of work, culture and society (xiii).

Kitsch will be considered as a typical product of modernity in terms of each of these three inter-related definitions. In the first place, considering the material changes associated with industrialism, these literally provided the objective material conditions of possibility for kitsch. In fact, it is not hard to observe – in the crudest sense – that kitsch invariably refers to industrially-made goods or mechanically reproduced objects. Despite this link, however, apart from these progressive material changes in terms of which modernity is often thought, there is also the fact that "it spews out some moral prescriptions – an inevitable concomitant of a cultural system that modernity is" (Gyekye 297). In this sense, "modernity can be defined as the ideas, principles and ideals covering a whole range of human activities that have underpinned Western life and thought since the seventeenth century" (297).[7] Indeed, thinking of modernity in material terms alone often

[7]As far as this periodization is concerned, Smart, too, observes that "[f]rom the eighteenth century European thought has displayed a concern with the question of the emergence and development of various social practices, institutions, relationships, and experiences considered to be constitutive of a distinctly different form of life – modernity" (144). And although the roots of the latter can rightly be traced back to the developments of even earlier ages, by the eighteenth century Western European societies had been set on a developmental path that was "distinctively different" from previous eras (Smart 145).

obscures the concomitant collection of cultural values. Thus, in the second place, kitsch will also be interrogated in terms of these values. As Tiffany rightly observes:

> [t]he precondition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions, and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends. It borrows from it devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, themes, converts them into a system, and discards the rest. It draws its life blood, so to speak, from this reservoir. (par. 2)

In this sense, an enquiry into kitsch would read as an enquiry into modernity, as both a material, historical process, and a collection of cultural values. Moreover, it is precisely this underlying collection of 'spiritual' or ethical assumptions (or occlusions), in which I am interested, as I will argue that the contradictions inherent in this collection of cultural beliefs comprising modernity become particularly apparent in kitsch.

Thirdly, 'modernity' can also be said to refer to the combined effects of the latter two definitions on the human 'life-world'. Importantly, I am specifically interested in the relationship between these profound effects galvanized by modernization, namely "a series of transformations in, on the one hand, the structure, organization and experience of work and production, and, on the other, art and culture" (Smart 109). Under this third definition, sociological factors – such as the rise of the middle-class and the notion of leisure – become important. And although these will be looked into, considering kitsch merely in terms of the latter would be, as Lyotard remarks (148), to sociologise or historicise modernity very narrowly, since, when concerned with the project of Enlightenment in terms of a *cultural* modernity, there are far more extensive implications.

Habermas defines the project of cultural modernity as "the separation of substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres" (130). These refer to science, morality and art, which came to be differentiated in the wake of the disintegration of the unified worldviews of religion and metaphysics:

> Since the 18th century, the problems inherited from these older world-views could be arranged so as to fall under specific aspects of validity, truth, normative rightness, authenticity and beauty. They could then be handled as questions of knowledge, or of justice and morality, or of taste. Scientific discourse, theories of morality, jurisprudence, and the production and criticism of art could in turn be institutionalized. Each domain of culture could be made to correspond to cultural professions, in which problems could be dealt with as the concern of special experts. (130)

Dividing culture into these various professionalized domains highlights the "intrinsic structures of each of the three dimensions of culture" (131). They emerge as the structures of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive rationality, which are each under the control of specialists "who seem more adept at being logical in these particular ways than other people are" (132). Accordingly, a gap develops between "the culture of the experts and that of the larger public" which grows ever wider (131). The knowledge that accumulates in each of these three autonomous spheres as the result of specialized treatment and reflection "does not immediately and necessarily become the property of everyday praxis" (131). The result of this type of cultural rationalization is that the life-world becomes increasingly impoverished.

The project of modernity, formulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, Habermas explains, had as its aim the development of "objective science, universal morality and autonomous art," each according to their own inner logic and to "use the accumulation of specialized culture [in each of these spheres] for the rational organization of everyday social life" (132). At the heart of this lay "the extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces but also the understanding of the world and of the self, moral progress, the justice of institutions and even the happiness of human beings" (132).

Thus, to return to the discourse of aesthetics mentioned earlier under which kitsch is usually approached, as seen against the broader context of cultural modernity, the discourse of aesthetics itself is one of these domains of cultural rationalization. Not only can modernity therefore be interrogated in terms of a series of material transformations or

a particular series of cultural concomitants, as contained under the first two definitions, but under the third definition of the cultural project of modernity, it also includes a systemized series of ideas (the discourse of aesthetics) for thinking about the arts, and thus, also about kitsch itself.

Keeping in mind Sontag's formulation for approaching a sensibility, the discourse of aesthetics consequently represents an instance where the notion of kitsch *has* hardened into an idea. As stated earlier, with reference to Foucault, it is important to keep in mind that any cultural category is a construct, and as such owes its appearance to 'a certain moment.' Therefore, I will consider the discursive space occupied by kitsch, in as much as kitsch serves both to uphold certain distinctions regarding 'high' and 'low' art, as well as to obscure the extent to which art and market function together.

Although I am not so much interested in a meta-critique of the category of kitsch per se, it is very necessary to address this fact if one is interested in considering kitsch beyond the way it has become entrenched via the discourse of aesthetics. For if one is indeed interested in building a definition for kitsch that is to read as an enquiry into modernity, doing so within the confines of the discourse of aesthetics will simply result in a definition for kitsch that is simply self-affirming of the very notion of modernity the study sets out to critique. Accordingly, in attempting to illustrate the dynamics at work in the construction of these categories, I will aim to make this 'hardened idea' 'fresh' again, and thus enable a discussion of kitsch beyond these confines.

Before this is attempted, however, it is perhaps necessary to introduce a fourth point in addition to this three-tiered breakdown of modernity. The tendency towards abstraction – or indeed towards the universal – that is introduced by the process of cultural rationalization, is indeed what lay at the base of the project of modern colonialist expansion: the belief that modernity could be applied everywhere with uniform results (Gyekye 297). Through focusing on kitsch produced within a local context, however, this thesis aims to undercut such a perception. Thus, to return to the original definition of modernity as designating "a combined [material], aesthetic, ethical and political outlook,

unified in eighteenth century thought, but splintered in the subsequent development of Western societies" (Brooker 125), having discussed modernity in terms of its material, ethical-philosophical and cultural apparatus, this thesis will focus, in the final instance, on how the notion of modernity also became splintered, not only in the "subsequent development of Western societies", but in the expansion to other, non-Western territories as well.

The methodology of this thesis could therefore be compared to the definition of postmodernism by Foucault, for whom it does not so much designate a radically different period as much as a mode of enquiry into the contradictions inherent within modernity itself (qtd. in Smart 161). Additionally, concerning those contradictions that become apparent as soon as the question of geomodernities is addressed, as well as my own position within postmodernism, I am in agreement with the following statement by Brooker. According to him, the single most dominant issue of twentieth century culture are the concepts of modernism and postmodernism (xii). He continues, "as with modernism, however, the important question is less what postmodernism 'is' or 'means', in any absolute sense, than *how* it functions and *for whom* it has functioned" [my emphasis] (3).

In line with Diouf's emphasis on the two issues at stake in a consideration of geomodernities, mentioned in the introduction, this stands in contrast, then, to the belief that postmodernism is purely a 'first world malaise', or the apolitical celebration of western culture. Moreover, it also accords with bell hooks' conception that "postmodernism cannot be simply dismissed as the apolitical celebration of Western popular culture. Rather, it can be read as part of the operations of transnational culture", as the cultural expressions of what Grewal describes as "scattered hegemonies" which are the effects of mobile capital as well as the multiple subjectivities that replace the European unitary subject (Grewal and Kaplan 7).

In the final instance, this also serves as a point of introduction to the present, which is ultimately the realm in which my concern lies. With regard to cultural expressions of

modernity and their relationship with the supposed current context of 'postmodernity' or the 'postcolonial moment' (and South Africa's position within these), an awareness of modernity in terms of its global concomitants becomes especially pertinent.

First, however, I will turn to a discussion of the discourse of aesthetics, before I proceed to consider kitsch in terms of the three-tiered definition of modernity expounded above, and before the final question of geomodernities can be addressed. Not only will this serve as the theoretical framework for the objects in subsequent chapters, but this very practice of contextualization in the latter chapters is what this project will depend on: reading modernity through the course of its local manifestations, as well as for whom these manifestations have functioned.

Aesthetics – the construction of kitsch as a cultural category

The process of evaluating works of art and their effects has been a concern of philosophers since antiquity. Yet it was only in the eighteenth century that aesthetics as such was formalized as a systematic philosophical discourse (Guyer 16). Moreover, the notion of modern aesthetics was tied inextricably to the Enlightenment and its conception of the modern subject as a subject in possession of reason, the exercise of which was the highest expression of the subject's moral will (17). This capacity, signalled through the idea of the freedom of the imagination, was intricately coupled with this intensified philosophical interest in the arts, and, as a parallel enquiry, the notion of 'good taste' in discerning 'good art' from 'bad' (17). However, current revisions of the assumptions of modern aesthetics, especially by Eagleton and Bourdieu, have criticized the way in which aesthetics can be said to function as a "technology of the subject", serving as vehicle for systematizing a collection of ideas for the constitution of the 'rational' modern subject (Gibbons 57).

Specifically with regard to the notion of "taste", Bourdieu points out that "taste is not pure but that it has inherent and particular nuances which show oppositional tendencies as these manifest themselves between and among the various classes" (qtd. in Gibbons

57). By "constituting the sacred sphere of culture" through the "denial of lower, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural enjoyment", this affirms "the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane" (qtd. in Gibbons 57). Accordingly, articles in bad taste (which are also often the designation of objects deemed 'kitsch') function as an 'other' for that which is defined as art, in order to keep up these distinctions and preserve the realm of high culture (65).

This is also pertinent when considering the origin of the term "kitsch," (*verkitschen*), used by the painters and art dealers in Munich during the 1860s and 70s to refer to inferior reproductions of original works, or poorly produced paintings of a low quality and market value (Calinescu 234). But, as is clear from its etymological inception, the term 'kitsch' emerges at a different juncture to the opposition between 'good' and 'bad' art set in place by the Enlightenment philosophers. It signals a degree of being intertwined not only with notions of art but also with that of the *market*.

Steiner and Phillips explain that by the late eighteenth century, what had become one of the most important aspects of objects, and of art objects as well, was "their operation as commodities circulating in the discursive space of an emergent capitalist economy" (4). The original dyad set in place between 'the sacred sphere of culture' and 'vulgar pleasures' was complicated by these economic shifts, especially since this very distinction which was depended on a specific definition of the work of art as the once-off original creation by an individual author, was destabilized by the notion of the commodity.

The reason for this becomes clear when considering the Enlightenment idea of freedom as conceived by Kant. As opposed to the "constraints placed on human beings by the natural world", reason enabled human beings, albeit occasionally, to transcend this state of physical dependence (qtd. in Phillips and Steiner 6). Art was thus seen as a means by which this dependency on the physical world could be transcended. Accordingly, the highest, most pure expression of freedom was "art for art's sake", whereas the lowest

forms of artistic expression were those "that were the most utilitarian" – or in other words, the commodity (6). The fact that art, as an object with monetary value, could also be considered as a commodity, however, detracted from these lofty ideals and presented it with a truth which it was unable to accommodate.

The opposition between the work of art and the 'vulgar commodity' was further entrenched by the following two discourses. The first refers to the anthropological theories of evolution and origin of art. During the late-nineteenth century, Enlightenment notions of the perceived autonomy of art were coupled with ideas about social Darwinism, marking the spiritual evolution of a society by its 'level' of artistic expression (8). This served to uphold the perceived cultural superiority of Western nations with regard to the cultural production by other, non-Western societies. As forms of cultural production in non-Western societies often served ritual purposes, or had very distinct social functions within these communities, they were deemed to be of lesser value, because they had a specific 'use' or 'function' as opposed to the purported 'autonomy' of Western art (8).

Secondly, the emphasis placed on a once-off, unique work of art was intensified by the ongoing effects of industrialization. Although, as Phillips and Steiner argue, "[s]uspicion of mass manufacturing and mass marketing and the desire to retrieve the authenticity belonging to the rare and the singular lost through the new modes of production both go back to the eighteenth century" (11), it reached a particular height during the Victorian era. During this time the nostalgia for authenticity, expressed in movements like *Art Nouveau* and Romanticism, intensified the cultural value attributed to the notion of the "authentic" (11). This amplified the worth of the 'authentic work of art' as opposed to the 'vulgar commodity'.

The binary oppositions on which the discourse of aesthetics relies, functions to regulate the notions of cultural value in the face of these notions being increasingly upset by the effects of modernization. Indeed, as observed by Myers, "the valorization of 'art' and material culture in the West has often been based on the object's resistance to, or

transcendence of, global processes involving commodifications, markets, money and mass culture" (4). Yet both these classifications have "almost always been unstable", as they had to mask these underlying social and material shifts (8). In this sense, one could consider the discourse of aesthetics as reliant upon a process of abstraction from context (as is pertinent for this thesis's concern with context).

These considerations aside, my concern with the discourse of aesthetics is that when it comes to a discussion of commodification and the rise of mass culture – and thus also the realm in which kitsch is often positioned – these canons of literary and artistic judgment, as McHale points out, "still furnish the bulk of our critical apparatus", yet they are "approximately no guide to its evaluation" (98). As McHale continues:

> [t]hey tend to place high value on permanence, uniqueness and the truly beautiful of ageless appeal. Such standards worked well with the 'once-off' products of handcraft industry and the fine folk arts of earlier periods. They in no way enable one to relate adequately to our present situation in which astronomical numbers of artifacts are mass produced, circulated and consumed. (98-99)

He concludes that "[w]e have, then, few critical premises with which to evaluate our present cultural milieu" (99). The technologies which enable it are historically new, and their "transformative capacities pose more fundamental questions regarding cultural values than may be hinted at here" (99). This problematic, also raised by Benjamin, has since been well theorized by scholars such as McLuhan and Baudrillard amongst others. Yet the discourse of cultural values mentioned here to a large extent serves still to entrench the way in which all cultural production is approached.

As stated with reference to my proposed enquiry into aesthetics, it is also here that I locate myself, in endeavouring to think kitsch beyond this binary, as kitsch is not merely reducible to these tensions within the discursive field of aesthetics. Yet these tensions persist as the background against which kitsch is most often defined, either as relegated to the category of 'bad taste', or identified as a system of falsification, imitating the processes of 'art.' Indeed, these are the positions most typically assumed, exemplified in

the stance of Clement Greenberg in his seminal essay on the subject, *Kitsch and the Avant-Garde*, which frames kitsch within a discussion on art, as "the shadow of art", or its "inferior double" (122). Giez agrees:

> [o]n the aesthetic level, people try to contrast kitsch and art, with the following results: kitsch is bad taste; kitsch is dilettantism; it is moreover without any originality, or else totally conventional; and is overloaded with rather primitive, affected and superficial attractions. Given that the conclusion of all of these collections of comments is the same – that kitsch is not art – it would be superfluous to quote any specific titles. (156)

However, these are not the terms within which I wish to negotiate my discussion of kitsch. This "[m]anichean difference of aesthetic quality", illustrated by Greenberg's modernistic agenda, sets up the following heroic scene. As described by Calinescu, "artistic modernity is the scene of a mythical battle between Good Taste and Bad Taste (i.e. High Culture vs. Mass Culture, or Authentic Beauty vs. Kitsch)" – in which the market is demonized and the 'spirit of modernism' angelisized (Calinescu 291). It tells a typically modernist story of emancipation – the emancipation of art from bad taste (292). But what this Manichean metaphysics indeed obscures is that perhaps both 'high art' (such as exemplified in the progressive tendencies of the avant-garde) and kitsch can be read as specific responses to, or 'aspects' of, modernity.

Kitsch – one of the 'faces' of modernity

For all its derogatory connotations, I will argue that kitsch can be read as a widely international phenomenon, a broad historical style, and as an intrinsic element or product of modernity (Calinescu 243).[8] To return to the three-tiered definition of modernity given earlier, kitsch will now be approached in term of each one of these definitions in order to gain insight into why, as far as modernity is concerned, as Calinescu maintains, "only kitsch can have a social reason for being" (227). I will start by outlining the technical aspects of kitsch, as treated by Dorfles, before proceeding to make a link with its ethical

[8]Scruton agrees that kitsch is a "modern invention" (par. 7). Adorno, too, speaks of the "historical necessity of kitsch" (qtd. in Calinescu 246).

aspects. When assessing the 'ethical vision' of kitsch (or its absence), it is important to consider the implications of the above-mentioned with regard to the human life-world, particularly as far as human 'sense perception' and emotions are concerned, as Sontag's assessment of a 'sensibility' proposes.

Technical aspects – kitsch and the process of mechanical reproduction

> It is far from difficult to recognize a certain synchronism between the appearance of certain kitsch factors and that of mechanical and subsequently electronic methods of reproduction and transmission of art. [Yet], this does not mean to say that there is an absolute connection between the two processes. (Dorfles 29)

As put by Dorfles, just because an object has been mechanically produced does not necessarily mean that it will be kitsch.[9] Indeed, there exist many examples of industrially produced objects that could be considered the apogee of industrial design. Surely no-one would refer to a beautifully designed Rolls Royce as kitsch, simply by virtue of being industrially produced and one of many in its range.

Rather, what is of importance here, as Dorfles suggests, is that "the easy (if not inferior) reproduction, and quick distribution of art (or pseudo-art) objects" highlights the mechanisms of cultural industrialization (29). It demonstrates the degree to which "the organizational system of the economic apparatus" dictates both the "creation and consumption of culture" (29). What Dorfles refers to here is the workings of the culture industry, which he identifies as "one of the main causes of kitsch" (29).

To begin with, reproduction has resulted in the paradox that objects which are "only apparently and extrinsically similar to the original" receive the same status as the original in the way they are "used, enjoyed and idolized" (31). To illustrate the latter, Dorfles maintains that one should not speculate about the existence of kitsch before, at least, the

[9]Calinescu concurs that "[k]itsch is not, however, the immediate and automatic result of the process of reproduction. To determine whether an object is kitsch, always involves considerations of purpose and context" (257).

Baroque period (12). Surely, earlier periods saw instances of mediocre artworks by lesser artists, as works which would never be regarded as masterpieces, but which still could be considered as art. Kitsch, Dorfles explains, as opposed to simply *badly* made art, kitsch involves the *falsification* of art (12).

Although kitsch might therefore display the "external characteristics of art", it represents a false interpretation of the aesthetic style it imitates, "almost always" says Dorfles, "for ethical, and therefore also political and technical reasons" (10). The following could all therefore be considered as examples of kitsch:

Firstly, it arises when "a single element or a whole work of art" is transferred from its original context, and used for an alternative purpose (18). For instance, copies of great monuments or architectural feats are kitsch, not only because they are "copied in a different material" and on a different scale, but also since they utilize its defining features as an oddity or an attraction, and thus abandon all considerations regarding its original context or purpose (18).

Secondly, this is also the case when works of art, recognized as so-called masterpieces, "become symbols of kitsch by being vulgarly reproduced and known not for their real [artistic] value but for a sentimental or technical substitute of these values" (19). This process functions in a manner that can be considered to be the opposite of intertextuality. Whereas intertextuality – whether in art or in an actual text – refers to another work in order to juxtapose it to the context into which it has been inserted, or to make a comment, these imitations only detract from both contexts (19).

Gregotti maintains that kitsch, at its most basic level involves a "transference of principles" (261). This refers to the way in which an object can be transformed through a "change of materials or the use of inappropriate materials" to disguise its function, or through contrasting form and function, in assuming a "different, but easily recognizable object and its own essential form" (261). Think, for example, how this applies to

postboxes shaped like a shoe or a golf-ball, or a cigarette lighter in the shape of a naked woman.

Another example is the "extravagant futility of various objects", which apply the rules of functionalism, mimicking the features of modern design, but which use these for strictly utilitarian purposes (262-3). Any relationship between form and function dictated by functionalism is disregarded, as it involves a mere "visual interpretation" that draws purely on stylistic characteristic. Although these might be "effete in principle" they are "fresh in terms of effect" (263).

The above-mentioned is demonstrated in the mania for aerodynamic principles in the 1960s, "applied as a symbol of modernity to the design of such static objects as radios, electric irons and hair-dryers" (266). This Gregotti explains as a form of mass communication in which the object communicates a recognizable element to consumers, in order to signal its "novelty" or being "state of the art" (266).

In the third place, this also illustrates how the leveling of culture gives rise to the constant search for new products, the "demand for novelty for its own sake, without any aesthetic or technical motivation" (Dorfles 30). This drive for novelty also illuminates the 'kitsch' use of avant-garde art. Importantly, it draws on the latter, but only after it has been accepted by the mainstream and is thus recognized as 'high art' by the masses (34). This is done by isolating a single facet of the artistic trend that kitsch tries to mimic and "raising it to the level of a pattern", thereby paradoxically stripping it of "any novelty value [or] informative impulse", as it is used only in a display of "up-to-dateness" (34).

The characteristics considered above are not so much a feature or 'result' of mechanical reproduction, but of the overall processes of leveling and standardization it entails. The latter also has an impact on culture, lessening the distinction between the copy and the original to the extent that "these copies become even more attractive, more beautiful and more effective than the originals" (32). Importantly, then, these objects become kitsch through their use. According to Dorfles, the most important factor in the identification of

kitsch is "the attitude of the individual when confronted with artistic and natural phenomena, which are observed from that particular point of view which immediately transforms it into something inferior, and no longer genuine" (29). In this sense, kitsch can be said to belong to all forms of expression (29).

When reflecting on the utilitarian considerations which often motivate these choices, kitsch can be characterized as a specific (even deliberate) misunderstanding of the aesthetic conventions it imitates, and thus as involving specific ethical considerations. To gain insight into this underlying ethical shift, I will turn to an examination of some of the historic or sociological factors underlying the rise of kitsch.[10]

Sociological considerations: the rise of the middle-class

It is hardly surprising that kitsch is contemporaneous with the rise of the middle-class. In the 1830s, Tocqueville noted the tendency, under certain segments of the population, such as the plutocrats, *noveau riche* and petite bourgeoisie, to imitate the aristocracy's patterns of consumption, in what he referred to as "the hypocrisy of luxury" (qtd. in Calinescu 227). Importantly, he noticed that objects that were once enjoyed for their aesthetic function only, were increasingly sought after by the middle-class as a mere sign of social status (227).

However, kitsch is not solely to be understood in terms of the status (or the so-called 'sign value') the object confers upon the owner. Indeed, the consumption of pseudo art does not always coincide with consumption for purposes of ostentation only (228). For example, coveting an item of imitation designer clothing is not motivated by the same impulse as that which will lead one to place a garden gnome at your front gate. "Consumers of kitsch may be looking for prestige – or the enjoyable illusion of prestige" as Calinescu observes, "but their enjoyment does not stop there", as this would underplay

[10]As stated earlier, at this point I would like to remind the reader that although all of these points of consideration are introduced, the link between them and kitsch is not to be seen as an absolute, but that these form a constellation of factors, which contribute towards very specific results. However, the oft made observation that the whole is not the sum of its parts, also applies here.

the importance of the promise of escape or easy catharsis offered (228). Although conspicuous consumption might come to bear on kitsch, kitsch differs in the manner in which it is used or enjoyed by the consumer. In fact, to Adorno, the latter illustrates kitsch's intrinsic modernity (228). He visualizes these "illusionary images of uniqueness in the era of mass production as mere vestiges" (qtd. in 228). The realm of objects functioning as conspicuous consumption he regards as a realm of artificial imagery, which owes its existence to a "desperate compulsion to escape the abstract sameness of things by a kind of self-made and futile *promisse du bonheur*" (qtd. in 228).

But, as concerns this supposedly "pleasurable escape from the drabness of modern quotidian life" (Calinescu 229), this form of escapism is nevertheless limited, in that the escape it has to offer must not be so far-flung and adventurous as to threaten the complacency of the consumer. As an articulation of the taste of the middle-class, kitsch is expressive, says Calinescu, of its particular "spare-time hedonism" (248). It can therefore be considered as a direct result of an "ethical mutation for which the particular time-awareness of the middle-class has been responsible" (248), a hedonistic as opposed to an aesthetic relation to objects. It is thus important to examine kitsch in terms of the middle-class's particular type of hedonistic sensibility, which is marked by a certain degree of mediocrity. As it is a hedonism that is confined solely to the use of spare time, it is a "hedonism of relaxation, and therefore compensatory in nature" (244), characterized by an "open, unprejudiced attitude, eager for new experience", but only insofar as these present no real adventure in the sense that it will drastically disturb the individual's comfort (245). It therefore entails, as Calinescu points out, an openness marked by a significant degree of "superficiality", and is devoid of "critical sense" (245). In order to fulfill this 'criteria', kitsch therefore has to answer to both the need for escape and adventure, as well as the need for relaxation.

In the second place, the way in which consumption has become not only a correlate of production, but a regulating social ideal, also has relevance to an understanding of kitsch. Although production and consumption are always related, according to Calinescu what differs is the ethical significance thereof. During earlier modes of capitalism, as

illustrated by Engels, the values of frugality and delayed gratification guarded against immoderate consumption. This was characterized by the Protestant work ethic, which solicited people to work without immediate reward (Calinescu 245). In the present day, these attitudes are reversed, and consumerism is "increasingly vindicated" (246). More than a fulfillment of basic needs, consumption has become a duty, a means of apprehending the world (246).

But when considering the "frenzy of consumption" in terms of the all-pervasive change that modernity implies, what becomes apparent is that this relativism causes a decreasing trust in stability or continuity needed to sustain such an ethos of postponement (247). In the absence of a belief "in basic unity of existence, or deep sense of continuity, derived from respect for tradition", both the Christian ethic of postponement as well as the progress myth, which ensured a sense of stability as "incentive for postponement", are replaced with the modern condition itself, in which "the future seems as uncertain as the past" (247). In the context of this instability and discontinuity, "consumption is the only thing to strive for" (247). To this end kitsch serves as "efficient art, the expendable cultural aspect of today's society, and one of the most direct manifestations of the triumphant ethics of consumerism" (247). But more than that, as Calinescu observes:

> Kitsch may be viewed as a reaction against the terror of change and the meaninglessness of chronological time flowing from an unreal past into an equally unreal future. Under such conditions, spare time – whose quantity is socially increasing – is felt as a strange burden, the burden of emptiness. Kitsch appears as an easy way of 'killing time', as a pleasurable escape from the banality of both work and leisure. Thus the fun of kitsch is just the other side of terrible and incomprehensible boredom. (248)

Calinescu proceeds to make the following link between the 'characteristic falseness' he attributes to kitsch as a result of having to occupy this juncture, and the relevance this has for a discussion of mass culture. With reference to the rise of the latter, it is useful to consider the following mutation of 'popular taste'. Where popular taste used to find expression, in earlier times, through folk music or folk art, although these might perhaps be described as naïve, they were by no means inferior – aesthetically speaking – to

processes of high art (243). But most importantly, "[f]olk art grew from below, whereas mass culture is imposed from above" (243). Thus, this "organic" link is dissolved, as the culture industry, sociologically as well as psychologically, becomes increasingly "expressive of lifestyle of bourgeoisie, the middle-class – style which can appeal to members of both upper, lower classes and, in fact, become the *ideal lifestyle* of whole society... all the more so as society grows more affluent, and people have more spare time" (244).[11]

By considering kitsch in terms of the material shifts that industrial modernization has brought about, and especially how this comes to bear on culture, kitsch has been contextualized in terms of the first two definitions of modernity. The third definition of modernity, the combined impact of the latter on the life-world, has been considered to some extent by examining the rise of the middle-class and the increased emphasis on consumption. But, in the final instance, this impact on the life-world will also be considered in terms of the impact of the latter in terms of human sense perception. This is important, especially as it introduces the human subject into the discussion of kitsch. As implied in Sontag's definition of a sensibility, kitsch ultimately entails a subject in possession of a sensibility. This is also pivotal when assessing the 'ethical vision' (or its deficiency) in kitsch.

Kitsch is characterized by an absence of balance "between means and ends" as well as an absence of "the use of the critical faculty to ensure the integrity of the finished project" (Gregotti 260). This 'critical faculty', absent in kitsch, is described by Gregotti as "that negative aspect of thought which is present in every valid project which sets out to

[11]In this sense "the prevailing Marxist view that it was more or less deliberately introduced by the upper classes to divert the working class or the masses from their revolutionary vocation" no longer holds true (Calinescu 248). More to the point, the "identification of the masses with the working class in a conventional Marxian sense" does not hold against the fact that the concept of mass culture applies to the middle-class as well, in fact, increasingly so. "Today it is perhaps more obvious than three decades ago that popular culture – to the extent which it is kitsch – responds primarily to the middle-class' psychological needs, which it tries, rather successfully, to generalize to the whole society in an electronized world that resembles very much McLuhan's Global village" (248).

dissociate itself from what already exists or has been used before, and aspires to fresh levels of perception" (260).

Importantly, according to Sontag's assessment of the role of art in the light of these technological changes, this is precisely the function needed for art to perform – to aspire to fresh levels of perception as "an instrument for the modifying of consciousness and organizing new modes of sensibility" (297). The absence of this latter function becomes important, then, as discussing the connection between kitsch and the effects of modernization is not complete without mention of the impact that these technological changes have had on the human senses, especially in respect of the realm of arts and culture.

The impact of industrialization on 'modes of sensibility'

As described by Smart, the technological changes brought about by industrial modernization are often driven by "the aspirations of military management and technological enthusiasts" (110). Above all, these are often developed insofar as they aid the "the interest of the military and industrial organizations in reducing uncertainty and enhancing control" (110). The fact, however, that the impact of the implementation of these technologies often results in parallel cultural and socio-economic changes that are "socially and politically undesirable", receives little consideration. Moreover, the effects of these processes also extend beyond the intended realm and impinge on forms of human sensibility, often in an unintended, unanticipated way.

Benjamin was also interested in the way in which human sense perception and judgment is affected by the confrontation between the arts and technology (111).[12] In the first place, the advent of technological advances that enables the high speed reproduction and dissemination of works of art, has the effect of the "loss of the aura" (111). This is a term that Benjamin uses to refer to the traditional values attributed to a work of art – those of

[12]His 1932 essay, *The work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction*, in which this is explored, is still regarded as a seminal study in this regard.

uniqueness, singularity and authenticity. However, these disappear irretrievably, as the proliferation of copies changes the relation of the artwork to time and space. As opposed to the once-off, authentic work of art, having a unique existence at a specific time and place, this entails the transformation of space and time as the reproductions of the original can travel to various locations where they exist simultaneously (111). Also, the processes of reproduction and new means of production enhance qualities which were absent earlier. For example, the film is able to 'zoom in' and give a 'close-up' of certain events, as in the case of a soccer match, which is not visible to the spectator of the actual event. Moreover, it detaches the object or the event from its traditional domain, in that people are able to view artworks in various contexts, without having to travel to the location of the original, or can partake in an experience (such as the soccer match) without actually being present at it. Consequently, the values of uniqueness and permanence are replaced by transitoriness and reproducibility (112).

In other words, these changes in the mode of production also transform the conditions of the reception of art. The context of appreciation of the original is altered through these copies which enter spaces and situations beyond reach of the original.[13] Nor do these changes leave the viewer intact, as these processes also have an impact on the human senses. The eye is literally 'cut loose' from its original context (that of the unity of the viewer in space and in time), and set free to follow these perspectives provided by the camera. Our "sense ratios" are thus literally transformed by this "desire… to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, and to overcome the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction" (Smart 115). As Smart explains, the central nervous system has been extended in a "global embrace", abolishing "time and space as far as our planet

[13]Yet this is viewed without nostalgia by Benjamin as a possibly cathartic event presenting a moment of radical crisis, as to him these changes allow art to be freed from its ritual or autonomous function and be based on another practice: politics, or rather, political critique (Arendt 241). In this sense, he is concerned with the specific shocks that can be administered by denaturing the work of art and liberating it for revolutionary practice. Ultimately, this would allow for the aesthetic to function beyond merely diffusing the shock effects of stimuli, and thus serve as a means of recuperation for the unity of the subject, but to intensify these in order to jar the subject into an alternative perception. Nevertheless, such a perception is still quite modernistic, in that it assumes the possibility a moment of clear perception, in which 'things as they are' will appear to the subject. Leaving Benjamin's interest in the latter aside for the moment, although he noted the profound implications of the impact of these forms on human sense perception and judgment, these were not really explored in depth (Smart 113).

is concerned" (115). Thus "our former fragmented space and time patterns become inappropriate, if not redundant, in a context where electrically concentrated, the globe is no more than a village" (115).

For a theorist like Sontag, this demise of the 'aura' (which ultimately also refers to its embeddedness in religious or secular processes) moreover entails the transformation of the function of art. Art, which arose as a "magical-religious operation, and passed over into a technique for depicting and commenting on secular reality, has in our own time arrogated itself to a new function" (297). In the context of the impact of the above-mentioned technological transformations on the senses, Sontag regards this new function of art as addressing the "dismemberment of the senses" mentioned above.

Currently, Sontag maintains, our sensibilities are being tasked with the interpretation of experiences, which, given the history of mankind, is historically new (296). In light of this imperative, art can no longer sustain the role of being a "criticism of life", or "propound moral, social ideas" (298). Rather, it is to become "the extension of life, this being understood as the representation of new modes of vivacity", in order to make us "experience more immediately what we have" (300). According to her, art is therefore to serve as a vehicle for extending and modifying, indeed of organizing and educating new modes of sensibility.

The form of sensibility that this "emerging new culture" entails, she maintains, is one in which there can be no divorce between art, technology and science, or art and forms of social life, as was the goal of the cultural project of modernity (299). Nor can it sustain accepted distinctions, such that between 'high' and 'low' art. As suggested earlier by McHale, for Sontag, too, this distinction takes for granted a culture which decidedly needs reexamining.

The same can be said for the distinction between form and content. Especially when considering that art is supposed to achieve a 'recovery' of the senses, she suggests that more attention be paid to the formal operations of the work of art – in other words, how it

goes about conveying its meaning and interacting with our faculties of perception, leaving them modified, however slightly, in the process. Interpretation, which focuses on content, is problematic to Sontag as it resembles the positivistic way of "observing" or "interpreting" a phenomenon in the world (13), the roots of which can be found in the scientific worldview of the scientific enlightenment" (4).

Given Sontag's observation that the multiple sensory experiences which confront the modern individual on a daily basis have the effect of "dulling" the faculties, it is "in light of this condition of our senses" that she assesses the task of art and critic alike in terms of "how far [they] set out to recover our senses" (13). She suggests that we ask the question "what does the work of art do?" rather than "what does the work of art say?" (5). "In the place of hermeneutics", Sontag concludes, we are in need of an "erotics of art" (14).

In terms of the criteria provided by Sontag, kitsch exists at the farthest end of aiding in this regeneration of the senses. It relies on rendering the system of representation finite, and as it does not refer to anything new or beyond the assumptions conveyed within this narrow demarcation, it certainly does *not* enable new forms of perception.

Kitsch as a closed, and therefore an unethical system

Broch, too, is of opinion that the tendency to render a system finite "constitutes the basic premise of every form of kitsch" (62). As such, he distinguishes between the workings of an ethical and an unethical system, a distinction which I regard as crucial to an understanding of kitsch.

Broch maintains that scientific knowledge can be defined as "an infinitely developing logical system" and that "the same can be said of art in its totality" (62). He explains that, in the first instance, "the *telos* of the system (a goal suspended in infinity and at infinite distance) is truth," and, in the second instance, "it is beauty" (62). Although the final objective of both examples remains a Platonic idea, "wherever the goal is indefinitely unattainable, i.e. in structures which, in the manner of truth and art, move relentlessly

forward, from one discovery to the next, which means that the goal remains outside the system, then the system may and should be called open" (63). Kitsch, however, leans precisely towards the opposite direction, as it positions the "Platonic idea of art – beauty – the immediate and tangible goal for any work of art" (63). Broch concludes:

> In science and art alike the important thing is the creation of new expressions of reality, and if this process is interrupted not only would there be no more art or science, but man himself would disappear [along with] his capacity to create something new. The artist who limits himself merely to a search for new areas of beauty creates sensations, not art. Art is made up of intuitions about reality, and is superior to kitsch solely thanks to these intuitions. (61)

According to the premises outlined above, Broch insists that kitsch cannot even be considered 'bad art' as kitsch constitutes its own closed system, "lodged like a foreign body in the over-all system of art, or appears alongside it" (62). Any system has the potential to become corrupt or distorted when "attacked from the outside in its autonomy", such as the unholy union between art and politics, which glorifies a specific ideology. Yet, Broch asserts, the difference here is that kitsch exists as the dialectical opposite of art (62). The problem therefore becomes all the more pressing once the distinction between the system and the anti-system is obscured, and the first cannot be seen as open and the latter as closed (63).

Importantly, an open system can be distinguished from a closed system in that it is an ethical system. The closed system, on the other hand, "even if covered with the veneer of ethics", is no more than "simple rules of play" transforming the "part of human life which is in its control into a game that can no longer be valued as ethical, but only as aesthetic" (63). As such, Broch explains, the closed system constitutes an order of a conventional system of symbols, and although these correspond in some levels to a "sort of reality" they nevertheless constitute a "system of imitation" (63). Like the "religion of Beauty" outlined above, all closed systems, such the Enlightenment cult of reason, or totalitarian politics, share the basic characteristic of positioning their own specific goal as the *telos* of their system (63).

The above-mentioned conception of an ethical system has many points of comparison with the conception of the postmodern sublime, especially as defined by Lyotard in respect of representational ethics, which always has to leave a space for engagement with the real.

Kitsch and its relationship to the Real

The Real is the final important analytical category in considering kitsch. For without spending time on theorizing kitsch in relation to the Real, one simply joins "the game of *quid-pro-quo*" in considering "objective factors – such as mass-existence – as the cause and kitsch and its consequence" when, according to Giez, all these "already represent the suppression of the kitsch problem which is uprooted as far as possible from its original basis – i.e. man" (166).

Introducing the notion of kitsch as a specific sensibility, implies a human subject in possession of the sensibility. I will now turn to considering the subject, specifically with reference to the category of the *Kitschmensch*, in order to explore the psychoanalytical considerations upon which I will draw for my discussion of kitsch. This is in keeping with critics such as Giez, who maintain that the question of kitsch should be approached from an anthropological point of departure, as the human subject contains "the vital premise for all the ins and outs of kitsch" (161).

This is also the suspicion of Broch, that "if kitsch represents falsehood (it is often so defined, and rightly so), this falsehood falls back on the person in need of it, on the person who uses this highly considerate mirror so as to be able to recognize himself in the counterfeit image it throws back of him and to confess his own lies (with a delight which is to a certain extent sincere)" (49). Thus, for Broch, to talk of kitsch, is not to "talk of art, but a fixed form of behaviour with regard to life" (49).

This describes the make-up of the *Kitschmensch* - or the kitsch man. Conceived of by Broch in the 1930s, the "man of bad taste" refers to "the way in which a person of bad

taste looks at, enjoys and acts when confronted with a work of art" (whether these are indeed kitsch or not) (16). As explored earlier, the attitude of the individual therefore constitutes "the central and most important factor in the identification of kitsch" (29).

Literally, the notion of the *Kitschmensch* provides what I found to be the "missing link" so as to speak, in terms of providing a proper theoretical framework for a reading of kitsch. Side-stepping the obvious essentialism that a category such as that of kitsch man might imply, the notion of *Kitschmensch* is to serve as a cue for methodological discussion, as suggested by Giez (158). By implying a human subject, it allows for kitsch to be analyzed from a psychoanalytical perspective, which I will consider in terms of the Lacanian registers of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic.

Along with the registers of the Symbolic and the Imaginary, the Real forms the basic triadic structure of the subject (Daly, par. 18). The Symbolic and the Imaginary both pertain to the order of signification. The infinite number of combinations that can be achieved via language and symbols is the domain of the Symbolic. The Imaginary, on the other hand, refers to the particular ways in which individuals make use of these. Importantly, the particular way in which the subject conceives of themselves as consistent subjects in the world, as well as the way in which they identify with an other is confined to the imaginary, specifically as concerns the way in which this informs their self-image (Daly, par.18).

Conversely, the Real cannot be said to belong to the order of signification, strictly speaking. Rather it represents that very point at which the symbolic proves to be inadequate (par. 19). Therefore, as Žižek argues, the Real does not so much represent something external as it represents an "internal point of failure", or "internal limit" (par. 20).

The paradox is that although the Real is internal to the symbolic, it is precisely for this reason that it cannot be expressed symbolically. To exclude the Real from the symbolic is none other than a symbolic determination – for it is exactly the Real as its "inherent point

of failure" that escapes symbolization (par. 21). Hence, the Real can only be experienced in the instances where the Symbolic "dysfunctions" (par. 22). As stated in the Lacanian aphorism that there is nothing lacking in the Real, lack only finds expression through a symbolic formulation, which becomes meaningless vis-à-vis radical negativity. Thus, although the real cannot be expressed directly, symbolic failure can allude to it through figurative representations of "horror-excess that threatens disintegration" (par. 22).

In an encounter with the Real, through "trauma, aversion or dislocation," we might be taken to the very end of our "symbolic-imaginary universe." Yet, instead of some "ultimate truth," what we discover there, rather, is "a particular marker of negation," an insufferable encounter that cannot be reconciled to that symbolic universe. And so, every encounter with the Real leaves us longing to "'awaken' back from the Real into reality" (par. 23). The real thus 'represents' neither a "positive secret" nor a "tangible breakthrough", but presents us with a painstakingly indefinable, "unsurpassable horizon of radical negativity" (par. 23). At this point, the rational, Enlightenment conception of the subject is exposed to its limits, "and is drawn into traumatic closeness with the subject qua night of the world; where it meets the subject as *an answer of the Real*" (Žižek qtd. in Daly par. 8).[14]

I find the idea of the Real quite useful, particularly in considering the extent to which kitsch can be regarded as a specific negotiation of the Real – or in fact, as I will demonstrate, as an attempt at the infinite deferral of the Real, or the banishment of the Real. Kitsch tries to fix meaning in the Symbolic by leaving out, or denying, a remainder. In this regard, kitsch becomes a totalising system that can be compared to the masternarratives of modernity. As Broch reminds us, kitsch first and foremost involves "the confusion of the finite with the infinite" (73). Giez concurs:

> man's greatest aspirations and hopes lead him into self-deception when they lose their charm of infinity and after his over-hasty attempt to realize them in their illusory

[14]As argued in *Between Simulation and the sublime: Piercing the veil: an Ideological assessment of Baudrillard's simulacrum* (Potgieter, 2006) University of Stellenborsch.

> concreteness. In that moment, the infinite ethical act of ethical striving is suddenly stopped, and the infinite ethical demand is degraded to a mere cooking recipe. (163)

The totalising function of kitsch, through its disavowal of the Real, becomes especially important when considering the relationship between kitsch and the emotions, which has not yet been discussed. A distinct feature of kitsch is that it relies on the generation of sentiment or aims to produce 'good feelings.' While Solomon argues that bias towards the emotions is only the result of the emotions being in disrepute since Enlightenment, and maintains that to dismiss kitsch purely on the grounds of its emotional appeal only perpetuates this prejudice (2), Rugg points out that the problem is that kitsch "tends to mimic the effects produced by real sensory experiences… presenting highly charged imagery, language, or music that triggers an automatic, and therefore unreflective, emotional reaction" (par. 5). Therefore, Rugg maintains, kitsch can be compared to simulacra in the sense that it does not play on any actual 'existing' emotions, but creates them (par. 5).[15]

Broch also identified kitsch as a system of imitation, as it is "purely reactionary… depend[ing] on the fear of death, as befits its conservative vocation", and as such "it tries to communicate to man the safety of his existence so as to save him from the threat of darkness" (72). Thus, as rightly observed by Rugg, kitsch performs a denial in order to provide comfort (par. 6). "It glosses over harsh truths and anesthetizes genuine pain", indeed, kitsch has no counter-concept, "its antagonist is not an idea but reality'" (par. 6). Accordingly, kitsch entails a denial of the Real. This then, is the perversity of the "solace" offered by kitsch, and the absence of any Real threat, is kitsch's hypocritical denial.

"Reduced to its elementary skeleton", Žižek identifies perversion as:

> a defense against the Real of death and sexuality, against the threat of mortality, as well as the contingent imposition of sexual difference: what the perverse scenario enacts is a

[15]In terms of Sontag's perspective on the notion of 'sensibility', discussed earlier, the fact that kitsch manipulates the emotions would be highly problematic.

> 'disavowal of castration' – a universe in which, as in cartoons, a human being can survive any catastrophe; in which adult sexuality is reduced to a childish game; in which one is not forced to die, or to choose one of the sexes… The pervert's universe is the universe of pure symbolic order, of the signifier's game running its course, unencumbered by the Real of human finitude. (84)[16]

Scruton, too, maintains that the world of kitsch is a world from which the Real has been banished – one of "make-believe, of permanent childhood, in which every day is Christmas" (par. 9). It is a world in which death "does not really happen" and in which the "'loved one' is repossessed, endowed with a sham immortality; he only pretends to die, as we only pretend to mourn him" (par. 9). To Scruton, a kitsch treatment of death represents a prime example of how kitsch tends to pervert "things that challenge us to transcend ourselves, to be something more than dependent children" (par. 10). He elaborates:

> Death demands grief and dignity and suffering. It is therefore kitsched into a sweeter and slushier condition, a childlike slumber that brings sentimental tears… When tragedy enters the world of kitsch, it is denatured, purged of that absolute sense of loss proper to the death of a moral being. That's why kitsch tragedy tends so often to be played out with animals – like the mother deer's death in Walt Disney's *Bambi*, which elicits grief harmlessly, because the character is – literally – a cartoon. (par. 10)

Aside from this creation of a cartoon-like world in which the Real is banished, the perversion of kitsch extends to the ethical capacity of human beings. As stated earlier, specifically in its imitation of luxury and its appeal to the emotions, kitsch can in many ways be regarded as a form of pretense. Yet, Scruton points out, not all forms of pretense is kitsch (Scurton par. 13). "Something else," he says, "is needed to create the sense of intrusion – the un-wanted hand on the knee" (par. 13):

> Kitsch is not just pretending, it is asking you to join in the game. In real kitsch, what is being faked cannot be faked. Hence the pretense must be mutual, complicitous, knowing.

[16] And when concerned with a local context, not to mention the Real of racial difference.

> The opposite of kitsch is not sophistication, but innocence. Kitsch art is pretending to express something, and you, in accepting it, are pretending to feel. (par. 13)

Kitsch as a form of emotional pretence, in which the spectator is implicated, becomes important when we consider that, aside from a collection of contradictions mentioned thus far, the Enlightenment originally also contained an ethical vision, on which its ideals of human freedom were ultimately premised.

Kitsch as a perversion of the Enlightenment's moral vision

The ethical vision of the Enlightenment can be described as one in which the higher emotion, as a function in a community of regard and criticism, is the basis of the social order (Scruton par. 17). Indeed, the greatest achievement of the Enlightenment, according to Scruton, is that instead of the judgment of God that sanctioned religious morality before the rise of secularization, it positions the judgment of our fellow human beings "as sufficient to raise us above the beasts and endows us with the dignity that may come from human freedom (par. 17).

However, without that faith, the ethical vision outlined above falters. Scruton therefore identifies the following predicament: the emotions needed to sustain this vision cannot be forged, but that very vision on which they rely – "that vision of human freedom and of mankind as subject and object of judgment" which prevents us from seeing one another as cogs in the machine of nature, without moral imperatives, subject only to natural laws – is fading constantly (par. 16). And this is then to this that Scruton attributes the rise of kitsch:

> when people who are avoiding the cost of the higher life are nevertheless pressured by the surrounding culture into pretending that they possess it. Kitsch is an attempt to have the life of the spirit on the cheap… It is the debased coinage of the emotions. (par. 19)

As argued earlier, with reference to Rugg and Broch, "the market in emotion" which kitsch comprises, says Scruton, must deal in "simulated goods" (par. 19). Thus, if

anything, this highlights the importance of an enquiry into kitsch, as I am in agreement with Scruton's observation that kitsch serves as no less than

> a vivid reminder that the human spirit cannot be taken for granted, that it does not exist in all social conditions, but that it is an achievement that must be constantly renewed through the demands that we make on others and on ourselves. Nor is kitsch purely an aesthetic disease. Every ceremony, every ritual, every public display of emotion can be kitsched – and is inevitably kitsched, unless controlled by some severe critical discipline. (par. 26)

To conclude – 'A return to the things themselves'

What has become clear from the above exposition is that, admittedly, kitsch is a site of many contradictions, and also the place where the tensions within the narrative of modernity emerge starkly. Within modernity's narrative of progress, an oppositional set of values is introduced concerned with the development of the subject through the maturing of his or her aesthetic faculties. It seems to instill the progression from being uncultivated, inauthentic and enslaved, to becoming cultivated, authentic and emancipated. Moreover, this vision projects humankind not only as aesthetically but also as *morally* 'cultivated' beings. Yet, at the same time, modernity produces that which it seeks to transcend, and kitsch emerges as its other. Thus, kitsch can indeed be regarded as a symptom of modernity – which contains the very elements that modernity seeks to banish in its progress narrative.

Having provided the tools with which kitsch can be approached, at this point I should add that I do not, however, wish to collapse my reading of kitsch absolutely into any one of these definitions (which, if I follow the guidelines set by my own project, would be a 'kitsch' thing to do). Rather, I aim to introduce these as co-ordinates to a discussion of kitsch, as productive enquiries into social or historical conditions. As expressed by Maus, the affinity for theory, as opposed to methodology, illustrates the belief, still predominant throughout the West, that the world is knowable through "words," and not through "things" (qtd. in Appadurai 4). A theoretical approach to things, Appadurai argues, is

conditioned by the perspective that things have "no meaning apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with" (5). However, this formal truth does not shed light on the "concrete, historical circulation of things" (5).

Accordingly, it becomes pertinent "to follow the things themselves," as their meanings become visible in their forms, uses and trajectories (5). Indeed, Appadurai maintains, things "become enlivened from human transactions" (5). If methodology, even more so than theory, traces the "thing-in-motion," in its "human, social context," it is not unreasonable to attribute to it a certain degree of "fetishism" (5). Finally, if this thesis could be regarded, also, as a specific type of 'human transaction' or engagement with objects, I see a particular reciprocity in that it is 'enlivened by' and will in turn, 'enliven' things. It is in this sense then, that having established the theoretical framework, I will turn to the 'things themselves'.

Proceeding, then, to South African context, I will look at the specific way in which the tensions inherent in the above-mentioned paradigms of 'progress' took shape within on a local terrain, and I will introduce the additional categories of modern myth and modern nostalgia. As such, I hope to 'break open' the idea of modernity as a universal category which could yield uniform results applied across diverse contexts in the process of modernization. On the contrary, I will highlight the contradictions that this instilled, by examining the types of kitsch produced in a South African context. To answer, therefore, Scuton's call for a continually renewed critical commitment, I arrive at the interrogation of this fourth and final point insofar as an investigation of kitsch as typical product of modernity is concerned – that of geomodernities.

CHAPTER THREE

Pre-apartheid to apartheid kitsch

> Kitsch is the most important, if still largely misunderstood, category of aesthetic production to have emerged from the political turmoil of the 1930s and from the polemics of late modernism. (Tiffany online)

The above-mentioned statement, when brought to bear on a South African context, seems to hold particularly true. Indeed, as observed by Pat Hopkins, the 1930s was the period that saw the inception of 'Boerekitsch' - "South Africa's own form of kitsch that so indelibly scarred the national psyche for fifty years after the 1938 *Eeufees Trek*" (*Struik books.co.za*, par.1).

Boerekitsch refers to kitsch spawned by various invented rituals of Afrikaner nationalism from the 1930s onwards and throughout the apartheid era, with its attendant paraphernalia commemorating various aspects of Afrikanerdom, or expressing (and prescribing, if not indeed inventing) the collective sentiments and aspirations of the Afrikaner volk. This is the trajectory that will be followed by the chapter at hand, in which I will examine the kitsch produced by the above-mentioned processes, the stirrings of which Muller describes as symptomatic of a "colonial society embracing many of the nineteenth century values, not least of which was of course a virulent nationalism" (295).

In setting up Boerekitsch as the focal point of this chapter, it is necessary to dwell briefly on the relationship between kitsch and politics. Dorfles, for one, certainly notes a particular agreement between kitsch and politics (113). Yet, although they both preside over a characteristic 'falseness,' the workings of kitsch and that of ideology are not necessarily reducible to each other. Indeed, it would be overly simplistic to collapse a reading of kitsch into politics.

Concerning the question of art-with-message, Bloch contends that not all art involving some sort of didacticism is necessarily kitsch (68).[17] Nor is the "type of art that offers a message" always directed at patriotic or nationalistic ends (68). Moreover, the criteria for regarding artistic production such as the diary, the film, the essay, or a work merely set against an historical backdrop, that deal in a didactic way with a specific political period, "will certainly never apply to monuments, statues [and] paintings celebrating the very same episodes as those treated [in the form of the mediums mentioned above]" (Dorfles 115).

Kitsch and myth: A frame for reading political kitsch

Dorfles locates the growing incongruency between art and didacticism "in the fact that nowadays art can no longer retain the figurative (in the sense of illustrative and anecdotal) role which it played in the past, and therefore any attempt in that direction can only degenerate into the worst possible kitsch" (113-115). To be sure, "great religions, philosophical currents and politics of the past have inspired so-called 'good' art [for centuries]" (113). Yet the present has seen a "radical change in [these] values" (115). This he attributes to shifts in the realm of myth, as the field which in the present day probably most succinctly demonstrates the workings of kitsch, as well as "both the aesthetic importance and the existential importance" of these changes (37). He therefore reconsiders the connection between kitsch and politics in terms of myth:

> Perhaps politics have always been kitsch. Which would prove that there can be no agreement between politics and art. But it might be better to say that 'bad politics' is kitsch, or at least that dictatorships are. And yet, even this is not altogether true: Napoleon was a man of exquisite taste… Bad taste in politics therefore begins with modern dictatorships… [I]n the past, people could accept the fact that a man was endowed – by fate or divinity, with super human powers. Alexander the Great or Caesar were not kitsch the way all modern dictatorships have been without exception (even

[17]Consider here the example he provides of medieval art, which despite its subordination of art to the religious element, still involved the more or less authentic expression of this religious worldview, in which it was embedded and within which it operated in an integrated manner. And from a modern point of view, not to mention forms such as the *Bildüngsroman,* for example (Bloch 68).

> when their politics happen to be based on reason). Nowadays, whenever art has to bow down to politics, or generally speaking, some sort of ideology, even a religious one – it immediately becomes kitsch. (113)

According to Dorfles, there is thus a marked difference between the claims of legitimacy of the rulers of antiquity and modern dictators, based on their alleged status as endorsed by a specific myth, as he argues that claims of legitimacy based on the integrated worldview of antiquity stands in direct contrast to the invented legitimating 'myths' drawn upon by modern politicians. Dorfles therefore distinguishes between the workings of what he regards as 'authentic' or mythopoetic myths and the 'inauthentic,' or mythogogic myths of modernity (which he also refers to as 'kitsch' myths) (37).

This is also identified by Haarhoff, who refers to them as 'major' and 'minor' myths (12). He describes the minor myth as:

> a prejudiced belief, a superstition, group lie. It operates through inclusion and exclusion. In the name of race, gender, class, religion, liberation or market orientation, it draws a boundary around my group at the expense of another group. It declares we are the 'chosen people' [and]… thrives on lies and exploitation… depending on defensive strategies and on guarding [and controlling] cultural boundaries. (12)

As opposed to these minor myths, major myths address "cosmic questions" pertaining to human experience, focusing on commonalities such as suffering, death and the meaning of life, in a manner that "seeks to understand part of the mystery of existence through story. They accept their fictionality [and] in doing so, they release their truth" (14).

Whereas major or mythopoetic myths allow for the universal to shine through in the particular, the false, or mythogogic myth elevates the particular to the status of the universal. Dorfles distinguishes between these myths as follows:

> the particular mythicizing tendency which gave rise to some of the greatest works of art, religion and literature produced by man in the ancient world is still present, although it no

> longer gives rise to imposing epics, powerful legends and religious tales, but to squalid fetishistic phenomena of inferior publicity. (37)

He therefore distinguishes between didactic art which expresses an integration between myth and world-view, and is always authentic in the case of the mythopoetic myth, as opposed to the 'invented myths,' or mythogogic myths of modernity. Although myth always involves some degree of invention, the latter involves a characteristically *deliberate* type of invention. This marks the "distinction between an authentic and positive mythopoetic energy and a spurious mythagogic projection which is almost always deplorable and ill-omened insofar as it is compulsory and heterodirected and gives rise to the fetishization of its own achievements" (37). The mythogogic demonstrates qualities of "substitution, falsification, sentimentality, coarseness and vulgarity in the image" (37), as a so-called false myth always "attempts to link up with real myth so as to become more effective and results in an appearance or attitude which is indisputably kitsch" (41). Dorfles explains how the latter is observable, for example, in the Fascist party's revival of ancient Roman customs and Mussolini's fascination with and emulation of the Caesars (42), thereby attempting to place himself and his politics on par with the legend in question.

The inventions of Afrikaner nationalism during the 1930s will be discussed in the context of the conception of the kitsch myth as sketched above. Dorfles identifies kitsch politics as politics based upon a kitsch myth, and political kitsch as kitsch paying lip-service to these modern myths. This outlines the framework within which the kitsch objects produced during this time and towards these specific ends will be analyzed. This chapter will therefore pay specific attention to considering the way in which these kitsch myths are constructed, as well as how they find expression in, amongst others, monuments, statues, paintings and objects celebrating these episodes (115). But in addition to the latter, I am interested specifically in the way in which this also finds expression in more mundane objects. For despite making the initial connection between kitsch and politics, and thus setting up the frame within which politics is to be regarded as kitsch, my aim is not to illustrate kitsch in terms of the workings of official discourse exclusively. For

although it would be attractive to denounce apartheid as simply an "utterly kitsch" political system (as is done, for example, by Bynard 50), I do not wish to provide a reading in which kitsch and ideology are treated as one and the same.

As Muller maintains, although it would be naïve to assume that the theorization of culture "can take place in a space where politics do not intrude or are important," this does not necessarily entail that all cultural theorization should be reduced to politics absolutely (286). I will therefore endeavour to maintain some level of tension between culture and politics, even culture expressing the assumptions instilled by politics, in order to retain some sense of the uniqueness of the field at hand. My focus thus expands from the political to the ways in which political assumptions trickle down, often to the most obscure and banal areas of everyday use.

Kitsch and 'national psyche'

Given my concern with kitsch as the expression of a certain sensibility, and having outlined the tension that I wish to maintain between kitsch and politics, it is perhaps necessary to spend time on the following. While Hopkins refers to the "national psyche" as "scarred" by the myriad forms of Boerekitsch (Struik books online, par. 1), there are also contrasting perspectives contending for a specific congruency between kitsch and the 'national psyche'. Greenberg, for example, in his seminal essay on the relationship between kitsch and politics, *Kitsch and the Avant Garde*, claims that "talk of art for the masses [is] nothing but demagogy" (121). He elaborates: "If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else" (122).

Greenberg contends that political regimes favour kitsch, not because of an innate hostility towards the avant garde, but because kitsch serves the purpose of ingratiating political regimes with their subjects, in that it "flatters the masses by bringing art down to their level" (122). It is therefore not a matter of the avant garde being too "critical" or too

"revolutionary" to serve state ends; the main contention is that "[s]hould the official culture be one superior to the general mass-level, there would be the danger of isolation" (123). Accordingly, "kitsch keeps a dictator in closer contact with the soul of his people," although, as Greenberg speculates, "if the masses were conceivably to ask for avant-garde art and literature," most dictators "would not long hesitate to satisfy such a demand" (123).

This is also often the recourse of theorists, to attribute to the collective sensibilities of a group of people, specifically those content with the invented myths of particular oppressive regimes, some "innate capacity" for it. For example, Calinescu notes the perception that in Germany, "instead of being mocked, [kitsch] was the essential part of the national spirit, habits and general atmosphere" (234).

Considerations are rife that Afrikaners, too, were indeed particularly 'inclined' towards kitsch, or shared an 'innate proclivity' towards it. Take for example the opinion of South African composer, Arnold van Wyk, who complained that "as a composer of serious music he lived in a cultural desert among his own people" (Muller 291). This he lamented in an interview for a local newspaper after allegedly being "asked by a Nationalist M.P. to 'end his perversity and compose boeremusiek'… Referring to Afrikaans audiences at the 'Wonder of Afrikaans' festivities in the Cape Town City Hall, he said Afrikaners reacted only to speeches and popular ditties. Serious music meant nothing to them" (291).

Furthermore, the popularity of Tretchikoff, the so-called "King of Kitsch" with the South African public, does not provide for much proof to the contrary. During the 1950s and 1960s his shows were the most well-attended in South Africa, and his prints sold by their hundred thousands.

As noted by McClintock and others:[18]

[18] See Grundling and Sapire "From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The changing fortunes of the Great Trek Mythology in Industrializing S.A. 1939-1988."

> Historians have shown scant interest in explaining the overwhelming emotional euphoria elicited by [nationalistic] celebrations, tending instead to collude with the mythologizing of Afrikaners as inherently atavistic and temperamentally given to quaint anthropological rituals. (376)

However, opinions such as those expressed above suppose an only all too easy 'fit' between a supposed essentialised social type and kitsch produced by the workings of political processes. This chapter aims rather to unpack apartheid as set of complex negotiations, allowing for a "notion of historical complexity" that Muller argues is "indispensable to South African stories" (297), one that does not merely subscribe to narrowly conceived oppositions between complicity and resistance. Keeping in mind Benjamin's conception of modernity as defined through a struggle for the definition of the present, apartheid will be figured forth as a series of confrontations between tradition and modernity (of which the kitsch myth will be demonstrated to be one such result).

As understood by Bendix, tradition and modernity are often created dialogically, constructed in terms of each other (298). It will therefore be demonstrated how the consolidation of a modern political identity took place through a renegotiation of tradition, in the context of the pressing need felt by many Afrikaners during the 1930s to create a past to reconcile the present to, and project into a future as not yet formed. In the construction of such a modern political identity, tradition is often relied upon for the consolidation of shared emotions through the evocation of the sentimental and the nostalgic.

Political kitsch is often characterized by the soliciting of these sentiments via "highly charged imagery, language, or music that triggers an automatic, and therefore unreflective, emotional reaction" (Rugg par.5). An emotionally charged appeal such as the above-mentioned has the unifying function of "elicit[ing] a conditioned response from a broad audience" (par.5) This key quality of kitsch, Rugg explains, is what

> Milan Kundera calls… the 'second tear:' 'Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see the children running in the grass! The

> second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running in the grass! It is the second tear which makes kitsch *kitsch*'. (qtd. in par. 5)

The workings of nationalism therefore rely on the appeal of kitsch, which "resides in its formula, its familiarity, and its validation of shared sensibilities" (par. 5). Thus, when considering the relationship between kitsch and politics, in addition to the workings of the kitsch myth, the stirring up of emotional responses such as sentimentality and nostalgia is an important component in the workings of political kitsch, which relies on kitsch for the consolidation of feelings such as illustrated above, in order to consolidate the assumptions of the political or nationalistic tendency in service of which it is put to use.

The stirrings of Afrikaner nationalism: The *Tweede Trek* and the invention of tradition

Turning to a consideration of kitsch with reference to the South African political landscape, I will start by examining the inception of Afrikaner nationalism during the 1930s. As noted by McClintock, the "animating emblem of Afrikaner historiography is the Great Trek" (370). Accordingly, I take the *Tweede Trek* of 1938 as my starting point, as it provided the seminal moment around which a modern Afrikaner political identity was consolidated. McClintock describes the events of this episode as follows:

> In 1938, two decades after the recognition of Afrikaans as a language, an epic extravaganza of invented tradition enflamed Afrikanerdom into a delirium of nationalist passion. Dubbed the *Tweede Trek* (second trek) or *Eeufees* (centenary), the event celebrated the Boers' first mutinous Great Trek in 1838 away from British laws and the effrontery of slave emancipation… [as well as] the Boer massacre of the Zulus at the Battle of Blood River. (370)

In commemoration of the events of the first Great Trek, groups representing the original trekker families departed from Cape Town, reenacting this journey into the heart of the country. McClintock continues: "Nine replicas of Voortrekker wagons were built" for

this undertaking, which "rumbled along different routes from Cape Town to Pretoria, sparking along the way an orgy of national pageantry and engulfing the country in a four-month spectacle of invented tradition and fetish ritual…. Huge crowds gathered to greet the trekkers. As the wagons passed through the towns, babies were named after trekker heroes, as were roads and public buildings" (372-3).

In her assessment of the mechanisms of nationalism at work in the *Tweede Trek,* McClintock departs from Benedict Anderson's conception of nationalism as emergent from technology enabled by the printing press. Whereas the latter's sphere of influence was limited to a "small, literate elite… the singular power of nationalism since the nineteenth century… has been its capacity to organize a sense of popular, collective unity through the management of mass national commodity spectacle" (273).

Given the political climate during the first decades of the twentieth century, McClintock maintains that Afrikaners were in dire need of some form of national unity:

> Afrikaners… had, quite literally, to reinvent themselves. The new, invented community of the *volk* required the conscious creation of a single print language, a popular press, and a literate populace. At the same time, the invention of a tradition required a class of cultural brokers and image-makers to do the inventing. The 'language movement' of the early twentieth century, in a flurry of poems, magazines, newspapers, novels and countless cultural events, provided just such invention, fashioning the myriad Boer vernaculars into a single identifiable Afrikaans language. (272)

But it wasn't until the events of the *Tweede Trek* that unity was achieved at the level suggested above. Organized by the ATKV (Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging, or *Afrikaans Language and Culture Association*), the festivities were supposed to stand outside the political sphere, yet they provided a singular opportunity for Malan and the National Party, who used the celebrations for their own political ends. By playing up the link between the 'hardships suffered by the Voortrekkers' and the latter day political struggle of the Afrikaner, the National Party was far more successful than the efforts of

other parties in using the *Tweede Trek* as an opportunity for furthering their ideological message (Gilomee 383-384).

More importantly, however, the *Tweede Trek* also involved the large scale invention of tradition in many facets, elevating both actual and invented historical detail regarding the Voortrekkers to the level of a national mythology, in order to endorse the Afrikaners' inauguration into modernity (McClintock 372). The event "offered a potent symbolic amalgam of disjointed times, capturing in a single fetish spectacle the impossible confluence of the modern and the archaic, the recent displacement and the ancestral migration" (376). In this sense, it served as "a vivid example of the reinvention of the archaic to sanction modernity" (370).

As described earlier, the linking of a political ideology with an invented myth constitutes one of the very hallmarks of kitsch. The first point to be elaborated, therefore, is the way in which a series of created myths was endorsed by this event. In the first place, there is of course the overt parallel drawn between the *Trek* and the Exodus of the Israelites. As quoted from McClintock, the events of the Great Trek of 1838 are inseparable from the attendant narrative of Blood River. The latter not only sanctioned the Voortrekkers' expedition, but elevated it to a mythical quest of a god-chosen people, in which the soldiers of the oppressive pharaoh are substituted by the Zulu *impis* denying Afrikaners their god-given right to the 'promised land.'

Before the *Battle of Blood River,* the Voortrekkers took a covenant with God, in which they undertook to celebrate on 16 December forever onwards if God granted them a victory in a confrontation with the Zulus. The fact that they did achieve a victory, was accorded the status of 'a sign from God,' sanctioning their journey into the interior and their dispossession of the native inhabitants, disregarding, of course, the obvious material advantages that the Voortrekkers' access to modern guns and their strategic position afforded them. In this regard, their expedition can be regarded in the same terms as the colonial 'civilizing mission' as sanctioned by the imperative of bringing both the 'light of Christianity' and the 'light of civilization' into the 'darkness' of the African interior.

To return to the Great Trek, then, it is important to consider the legendary, or even mythological or quasi-religious status awarded to this endeavour. Moreover, the above-mentioned illustrates the extent to which the Great Trek formed the central focal point within a constellation of 'mythologies.' As such, 'the Voortrekkers' in general provided a point of reference for the attachment of subsequent mythologies, both that of the 'founding myth' of the nation as well as its legitimating narrative through the discourse of suffering (as signified by the Battle of Bloodriver, *par excellence*). In order to launch an enquiry into this constellation of myths, I will start to untangle them through the assessment of a number of images vested in them.

The first image to be considered portrays the notion of the 'founding myth.'[19] It depicts the silhouettes of a group of women coming up from behind a mountain top, back-lit by what seems to represent the rising sun [Fig 3.1]. This image of the literal 'dawning of the nation' accompanies an article on the Voortrekker woman, who is figured forth as the 'mother of the nation.' In describing the supposed 'racial origins' of the Voortrekker woman, it is claimed that:

Figure 3.1 Voortrekker Women rising behind a mountain top

[19]On this point, it is important to note that the 'beginning' at stake here, was literally added on only at the 'end.'

> [b]y and large, the Voortrekker woman can be considered a descendent of the Germanic woman, who since antiquity, even before the time of the Christian faith, was already renowned for her moral strength, as well as her chaste, virtuous character. In her, the fertile acre was prepared in which the Christian faith was to take root. (Steyn 79)

In the above-mentioned narrative the Voortrekker woman is positioned outside time, in mythical time, preceding history as inaugurated by the Christian faith. She thus literally embodies mythical time, or the dawn of time, out of which she emerges spontaneously, like Venus being birthed from the waves. And in giving birth to the Afrikaner nation, the nation as such is also positioned as outside time, indeed as having a 'timeless' character and naturalised as preceding any actual historicity. The Afrikaner is accordingly absolved from the realm of material struggle, such as displacement of racial others through territorial expansion.

Furthermore, by naturalizing women's connection with the land, comparing their bodies to a 'fertile acre', this further serves to disguise the above-mentioned material relations. The women ascend from behind the mountain-top, in an otherwise empty landscape, creating the impression that they have literally 'sprung up' out of nowhere. In addition, women are positioned as both the body which 'gives birth to a race' as well as keeping up the boundaries of race. Steyn praises the virtues of the Voortrekker woman in upholding the rituals of civilization on the trek into the wilderness, such as the secular and religious education of children, as well as washing, cooking and sewing:

> [T]hanks to this, the boere nation did not degenerate into a nation of crossbreeds, but retained and developed its own unique character… The Voortrekker woman was intent on upholding all forms of order, tidiness and benevolent charity. (85)

Thus the Voortrekker woman (and through her, the birth of the Afrikaner nation) is represented in mythical terms. But, on another level, this image also refers to the widely reputed tale of the Voortrekker women who trekked 'barefoot over the Drakensberg', playing on the legitimating narrative of the land as being 'bought through hardship and suffering'.

The representation of this notion of the 'barefoot Voortrekker women,' serves as yet another example of kitsch. This 'legend' originated from the following historical events, from which it was absorbed into the national imaginary. In 1842, after the first Great Trek to Natal, in opposition to the docile acceptance of their male counterparts, the women of the newly established Boer republic resisted the prospect of being subsumed once again under the British crown, expressing their dissent to a British officer by stating that they "would rather walk barefoot over the Drakensberg than serve under the British" (FAK 258). The manner in which this incident is portrayed, however, here and elsewhere, illustrates the extent to which this episode is replayed as actual fact.

This literalism is also expressed in the erection of the *Kaalvoet Vrou* of Harrismith [Fig. 3.2] on the Retiefpas over the Drakensberg. This figure of a barefoot woman in the characteristic Voortrekker attire was set up in 1977 to commemorate the "Voortrekkers' courage and strength of will, but above all the resolute determination of their women" (258). Furthermore, literally life-sized, this monument underlines the literalness with which this historical anecdote has been endowed, or literally 'brought to life.'[20] Looking back in the direction of Natal, the woman gazes out "over a land bought by blood, but from which must be once more departed, since the striving for freedom has once more

Figure 3.2 The *Kaalvoet Vrou* of Harrismith

[20]Consider here Haarhof's conception of minor myths as tending "to make all things literal." The in-group in command of such myths treat its assumptions as facts, legitimating a world-view that allows for little ambiguity or uncertainty (13).

been denied" (258). In the final instance, the statue 'makes concrete' the ever-present myth of suffering, represented by the notion of the barefoot woman – the bare female feet as the equivalent of the male rifle, 'buying the land through suffering and strife.'

But more than merely "enacting a backward-looking, atavistic ceremony of ancestral cult worship," as stated by McClintock, "the *Tweede Trek* can be read as an exemplary act of modernity: a theatrical performance of Benjamin's insight into the evocation of archaic images to identify what is new about modernity" (376). Thus, in addition to serving as a central point of reference in the construction of a national mythology, the Voortrekkers also provided the site for the "invention of tradition." As stated earlier, tradition and modernity often function dialogically. The above-mentioned therefore expresses the necessity for the creation of past, in legitimation of both the present and the desired future. This is also referred to by Gilomee, who describes the *Tweede Trek* as "the return of history."[21] Thus, history returns, but it returns from the future – a future which is not yet made or achieved – in other words, a future which has not yet arrived.[22]

As concerns the 'invention of tradition,' this has moreover to be read against the fact that there was little information available regarding the trek at a day-to-day level. A team of historians were therefore employed by the ATKV to scrutinize the scant photographical records and scarce written resources, often relying only on oral accounts. Gilomee observes that the 1930s did indeed see an unprecedented upsurge of interest in the history of the Afrikaners (383). Yet, as far as actual historical details such as clothing are concerned, as well as practices which have since then been elevated to the level of national 'rituals' (such as the *braai*, for example), these were often the product of invention.

[21]"Die Geskiedenis Keer Terug" (383)

[22]See Foster's description of the temporal workings of the Avant Garde, and thus the functioning of the Tweede Trek can be regarded as retroactive when compared to these. Foster speaks of the Avant Garde as the introduction of a revolutionary moment to the present, but moreover, it is a revolutionary moment that "returns" from a revolutionary future that has not yet arrived. In this sense, the *Tweede Trek* can be regarded as radical, in that it constitutes a revolutionary moment in that sense, but a revolution on the far right.

As admitted by Kestell:

> we can determine what the Voortrekkers wore, from inherited pieces kept in museums or those privately owned. Yet there does not exist a single intact outfit, with reference to which one can say: 'That is how the Voortrekkers dressed!' As far as the people on the treks are concerned, no paintings or drawings could be obtained from them, and it is also worthy of note that we have no image of a young girl in her fitting white *kappie.* (123)

Not withstanding their uncertain status, these images "were swiftly incorporated as a fixed part of popular culture" (Gilomee 383). As McClintock relates, "white men grew beards, and white women donned the ancestral bonnets" along the way of the *Tweede Trek*" (371-373). Also, the clothes of the Voortrekkers quickly became part of the national culture, as it was the traditional clothes to be worn at the *volkspele*[23]. It was also during this time that 'the braai' became popular, as people in both the towns and the cities through which the wagons progressed, started making their food in the open air, over a fire, "in imitation of the Voortrekkers who prepared their meals in the open air" (383).

The cover of *Die Huisgenoot* of April 1942 articulates the extent to which these images and practices were absorbed as part of the national culture. Depicting a Voortrekker couple at a *braai* [Fig. 3.3] both the man and the woman are dressed neatly in traditional clothes, cooking a sausage on a fork over what appears to be a bonfire.

Upon closer examination, the way in which this supposedly historical (or traditional) scene is represented, is reminiscent of Keet's observation that trek itself was "both part

[23]The *volkspele* refers to a collection of folk-games and folk-dances that was supposedly engaged in by the Voortrekkers, but were actually "invented" by cultural brokers during the 1930's who were convinced that Afrikaners needed their own folksongs and dances in their own language. Yet most of these were based on, or translated from, existing German folk-dances and melodies. Compare Calinescu's remarks on folk culture in Chapter Two, in which he maintains that as opposed to folk culture, which grows spontaneously from the bottom, or "traditional roots" of society, popular culture is imposed from above. The Volkspele and the "invented traditions" of the *Tweede Trek* presented the interesting deviation of mass culture *as* folk culture. Moreover, the invention of the Voortrekker attire as traditional wear ignores the fact that in the case of the folk dances of European cultures they were imitating, the participants wear traditional "costumes" only for the purpose of engaging in folk dances. Thus, the relegation of the "every-day" clothes of the Voortrekkers to traditional costume straddles this additional paradox.

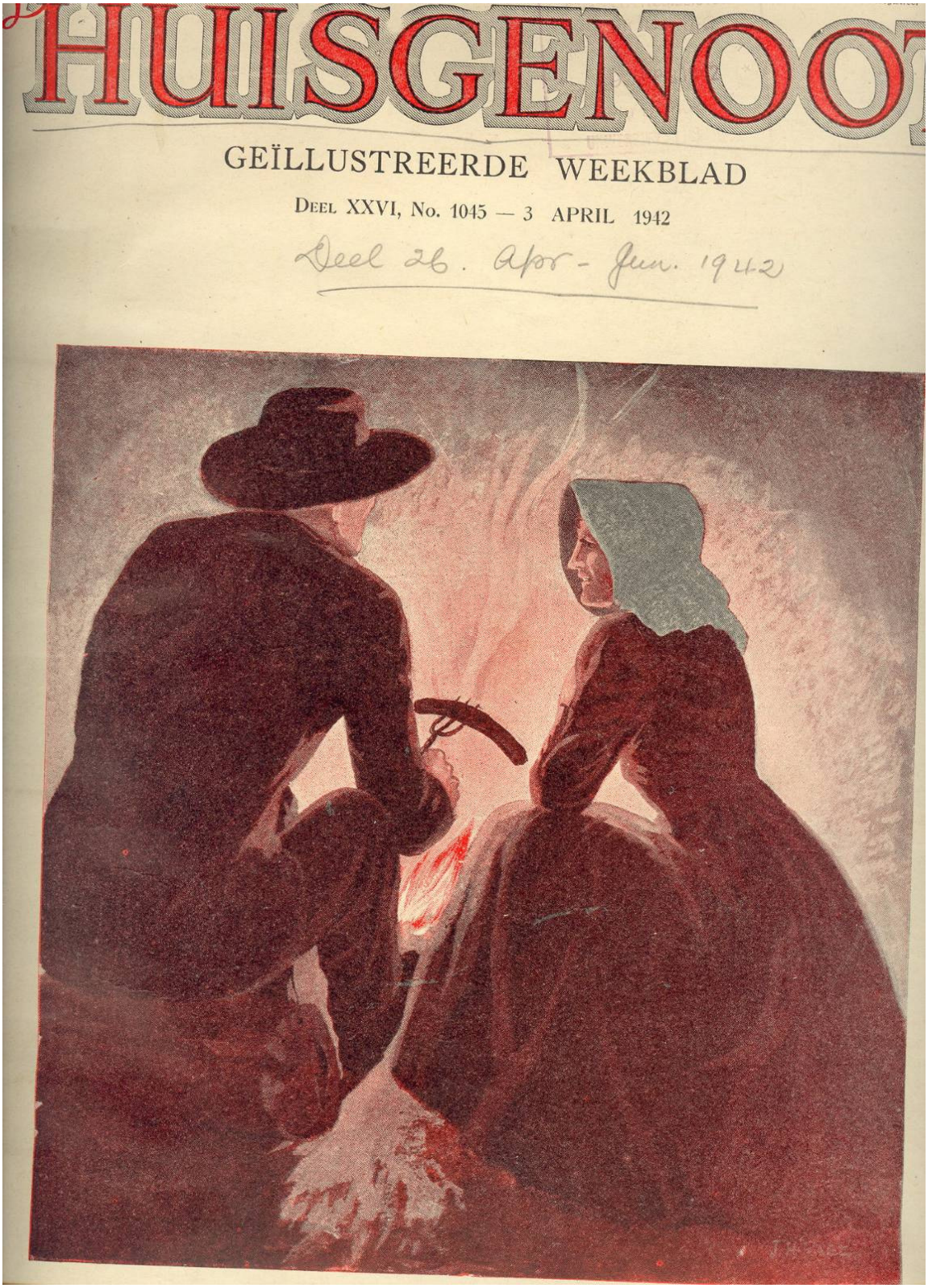


Figure 3.3 The cover of *Die Huisgenoot*, 3 April 1947

novelty and part romantic nostalgia" (qtd. in Gilomee 384). First of all, the fork suggests an air of refinement, nor does the sausage look as if it was stuffed behind the wagon wheel but rather bought at the local supermarket. Also, their clothes are clean and well tailored. Although the scene does convey a sense of 'being out in the open,' it also suggests a romantic setting, conveying more a feeling of appreciating 'the great outdoors' than being 'out in the wilderness.' The intimacy of the man and the woman gathered alone around the fire is underlined by the woman who leans in to hear what the man has to say (emphasized by the phallic suggestion of the sausage which the man has to offer her). The staging of this 'romance' in many ways illustrates the 'romantisation' of history.

As illustrated above, the articulation of these 'founding myths' and 'invented traditions' was not only restricted to the level of national 'spectacle' but also flourished in the popular media, as the *Tweede Trek* presented a rich collection of imagery to be drawn upon for furthering commercial ends of all sorts. Whether simply subscribing to the Afrikaans wisdom, "as dit pap reën moet jy skep" (if opportunity presents itself, you should embrace it), these commercial images nevertheless expressed the extent to which these symbolically enacted assumptions filtered through to the most obvious level of day-to-day turns of phrase.

Tradition and modernity: Kitsch and advertising

The first set of examples to illustrate the above-mentioned are advertisements that come from a series of booklets produced to commemorate the events of the *Tweede Trek* as well as the inauguration of the Voortrekker monument in 1949. Already conceived and planned since 1931 in order to coincide with the centenary celebrations, the latter was only completed in 1949, after its original design became increasingly elaborate and sufficient funds hard to obtain. Nevertheless, the 1938 centenary saw the *Tweede Trek* culminating in Pretoria, where the keystone-laying for the monument took place. The 1949 inaugural ceremony was set just after the National Party won the elections in 1948. The ceremony provided a touchstone with the euphoria of the *Tweede Trek,* to be

revisited and channeled towards Nationalist purposes. Because of this sense of continuity between these events, the advertisements will be read together. Moreover, this illustrates the extent to which these images provided a lasting point of reference.

According to Dorfles, kitsch is grafted onto advertising through one of the following two possibilities:

> 1) the use of kitsch material in the actual drawing up of the advertising message, or in the manner of its representation; and 2) the use of material that is not definitely kitsch and that is acceptable from the viewpoint of graphic and pictorial taste, but which is used to advertise objects or aspects which can be included in the kitsch ambiance. (180)

The first group of advertisements to be discussed in this section falls under the first category in that their "manner of representation" can be regarded as kitsch. This first set comprises a collection of images that rely on the juxtaposition of wagon and automobile for a negotiation of modernity. By placing the ox wagon side-by-side with the motorcar, what is new about modernity is signalled through an evocation of the archaic, drawing a direct line of continuity between the past and the present. There is consequently a doubling of time, as the past is both set off against the future, marking the future as 'new' or 'improved', as well as drawn upon in order to illustrate a line of continuity with the past, suggesting a future in which all the characteristics of the past which are good and timeless ('the good old') are still present.

The *Pegasus & Mobiloil* advertisement [Fig. 3.4] presents the image of the 'modern' superimposed on a rendition of the 'past,' suggesting an almost cinematic fade into present and linking Voortrekkers with idea of progress (and hence modernity). As suggested by name *Voortrekkers* (literally 'those who trekked first/ in front' or 'the pioneers'), the trekkers' advance into the interior is projected as synonymous with the

Figure 3.4 Pegasus & Mobiloil

Figure 3.5 Atlantic Petrol and Motoroil

forward thrust of progress. By "saluting the Voortrekker spirit", the advertisement poses the manufacturers, like the Voortrekkers, as an agent of modernity, helping South Africa along the 'march of progress'. Depicting the migration of the Voortrekkers as necessary for development, the trek becomes synonymous with the 'great march of modernity' and indeed as necessary part of it.

The next image is an advertisement for *Atlantic* motor oil [Fig. 3.5]. Relying on an essentialized notion of human nature, the "drive to explore" is drawn upon in order to establish a link between the Voortrekkers and the producers of *Atlantic* motor oil, who share their desire "to be first in a new field" through their "groundbreaking" research when it comes to oil. The image of the Voortrekkers as pioneers is thus linked to the producers of *Atlantic* oil as "pioneers of technology". A sense of continuity between 'us and them' is established, linking past to present. By juxtaposing the ox wagon with its obvious contemporary counterpart, the automobile, the notion of progress is also

suggested. The Voortrekkers' 'journey into the interior' is legitimised, moreover, on two accounts: firstly, as necessary concomitant of progress, and secondly, in terms of an appeal made to an essentialised notion of human nature ("the drive to explore"). This supposed 'essential trait' is naturalized and simultaneously aligned in service of progress, naturalising the notion of progress in the process, as the natural order of things, or the inevitable outcome of human nature. Moreover, this 'trait' is glorified as the foundation of modern society, making a naturalist argument to justify what is in essence the outcome of culture.

In Fig 3.6, which advertises *Texaco* petrol and oils, the manufacturer apparently proposes itself as the modern answer to the question: *Wat is 'n boer sonder sy roer?* (What is a boer without his rifle?) A grandfather is depicted as sitting in his garage, telling his grandchildren about the 'good old days' of the Great Trek. Pointing to a picture of the ox wagon on the wall (symbolizing the past), which contrasts with the present in which the scene is situated (signified by the presence of motorcar in the background), he claims that today, while traveling "the length and the breadth of our country, along well-mapped roads, with fast motorcars driven by powerful engines, we no longer need to rely on guns and bullets for the necessary protection, but on Texaco oil". Referring to "guns and bullets" as "necessary protection," the attendant narrative of violent conquest implicit in the reminiscing

Figure 3.6 Texaco Motor Oils

about the Great Trek[24] is legitimated as necessary concomitant to progress, implied by the "well-mapped roads" and charted spaces of the interior today. Moreover, by drawing on the figure of the grandfather, who relates this history to his grandchildren, the notion of family values is evoked. Thus the imperative of having to 'preserve the tales of the Voortrekkers for posterity' is sentimentalised in the conflation of national history and family history.

The progress of modernity is also depicted in the shifting contexts of the enjoyment of a pipe of *Boxer* tobacco [Fig 3.7]. The movement from wagon to car indicates the progression of history as synonymous with the forward movement of the vehicle, as in this advertisement, there is literally 'being traveled' from one context to the next. Implicit in this image of the ox wagon traversing the wilderness is the absence of domestic comforts which the trekkers had to endure, a deprivation which is juxtaposed with the enjoyment of a pipe during a "quiet hour at home". This serves as a reminder that the Afrikaner today should be grateful for the comforts of civilization bought through the struggle of their forebearers. Moreover, the agent engaged in smoking is male, suggesting the patriarchal lineage of modernity. As suggested also in Fig.3.7, where history is transmitted through the patriarchal figure of the grandfather, it is man who acts as receptor of what has been achieved by their 'fore-fathers'.

Figure 3.7 Boxer Tobacco

[24]With reference to the earlier observation that the Great Trek and the Battle of Blood River can be regarded as inseparable narratives, in which the battle of Blood River exemplifies or comes to stand in for all the instances of violence implicit in traveling across the interior.

McClintock notes how this negotiation of temporal zones within modernity intersects with the notion of patriarchal lineage in interesting ways. This is also central to the "myth of the empty lands", which forms an integral part of the collection of myths under scrutiny (369). According to her, the contradiction that the "empty lands [were] in fact peopled" is resolved through "the invention of anachronistic space" (369). As such:

> [t]he colonial journey is figured as proceeding forward in *geographical* space, but backward in racial and gender time, to a prehistoric zone of linguistic, racial and gender degeneration. At the heart of the continent, a historic agon is staged as degenerate Africans 'falsely' claim entitlement to the land. A divinely organized military conflict baptizes the nation in male birthing ritual, which grants the white men the patrimony of the land and history. (369)

The domestic idyll enjoyed by the man smoking, and the conquest of native peoples implicit in the former's achievement (as suggested in the previous advertisement), is thus to be perpetuated in the present via apartheid so that the enjoyment of the 'benefits of civilization' can be continued.

What is interesting about the collection of advertisements discussed so far, as well as those to follow, is that they position their products as both an achievement, as well as agent of modernity. The product is figured forth, firstly, as one of the consequences of modernity, in the sense of being at the pinnacle of innovation or technology. Thus it endorses the narrative of progress as well as the trek as its enabling condition. Secondly, the product also claims the status of being a bearer of modernity, as indeed one of the enabling conditions under which the trek was possible. This is particularly apparent in the collection of advertisements for *Trekker* coffee [Fig. 3.8], which presents *Trekker* coffee as the driving force behind many of the 'achievements' of the Voortrekkers, which they supposedly would not have been able to accomplish without a cup of *boeretroos.* As illustrated in the four advertisements in question, without it, traversing the Drakensberg, crossing a river, founding a new town, or eventually reaching the 'promised land', would not have been possible.

Figure 3.8 The 'driving force' behind the Voortrekkers – *Trekker Coffee*

The advertisement for Andrews Liver Salts [Fig. 3.9] is also concerned with the 'great march of modernization', but this time thanks to modern medicine. Health and hygiene have long served as legitimizing tropes for imperial conquest, in which references to keeping 'the body of the nation' clean and healthy often served as an injunction to guard against racial degeneracy. This point is explored at length by McClintock in *Imperial* Leather. In the chapter entitled "Soft Soaping Empire – Commodity Racism and Imperial Advertising", she demonstrates how advertising campaigns which rely on notions of cleanliness were in fact deeply entwined with notions of racial purity and the maintenance of boundaries around 'whiteness'. In this sense, the call for keeping the intestines clean (or *rein*, which in Afrikaans also carries the connotations of being "pure" or "untainted"), coincides with references to the maintenance of outward racial purity.

But there is also a reference to another image, which at the time figured quite ubiquitously. The caption "the way to intestinal purity" cannot but be compared to *De Breede en De Smalle Weg* ('The wide and the narrow road'), an image ever-present in the average Afrikaner home [Fig. 3.10]. As stated earlier, with reference to the Battle of

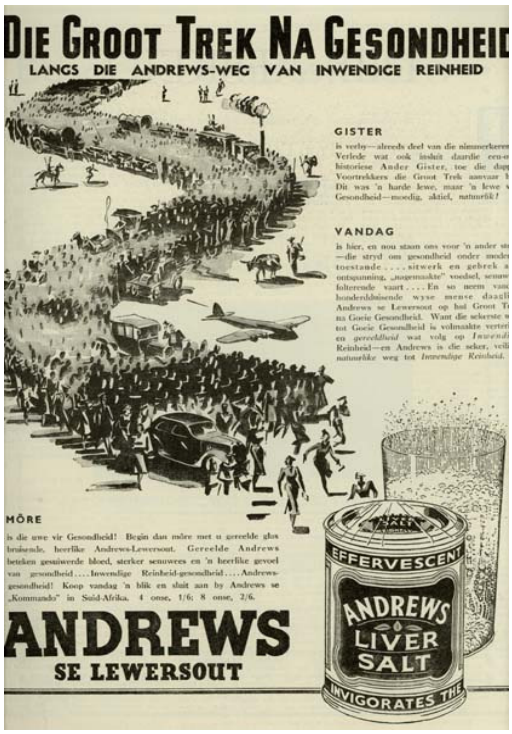


Figure 3.9 and 3.10 Tbe Andrews way of Intestinal Purity (left) and *De Breede en de smalle weg* (right)

Blood River, the imperial mission of bringing the 'light of civilization' to the rest of the world and thereby 'uplifting' 'inferior' races, also coincided with the God-given mission of bringing the 'light of Christianity' to the rest of the world. Moreover, the colonial mission was thereby granted the status as a god-given mission, as it was also ultimately concerned with ensuring the spiritual 'upliftment' of these races. The latter was often endorsed through embracing the habits of cleanliness – and thus the 'purification' and 'upliftment' of oneself, which in the given context carries strong racialized overtones, in that whites need to upkeep and preserve their "whiteness" – or their supposed "racial purity.

The trope of cleanliness, health and whiteness is also rehearsed in [Fig. 3.11], which depicts a little cameo of a housewife's pleasure at the acquisition of a new iron. Her maid, however, leaves the iron face down on the ironing table and is thereby represented as either 'stupid', uneducated, or simply non-comprehending of the use of modern technology. In contrast, the 'mistress of the house', whose knowledge that an iron should not be left face down, demonstrates the integration of the white woman into modernity, as opposed to the unassimilatability of the black woman. Furthermore, the advertisement positions whites as the legitimate heirs of modernity.

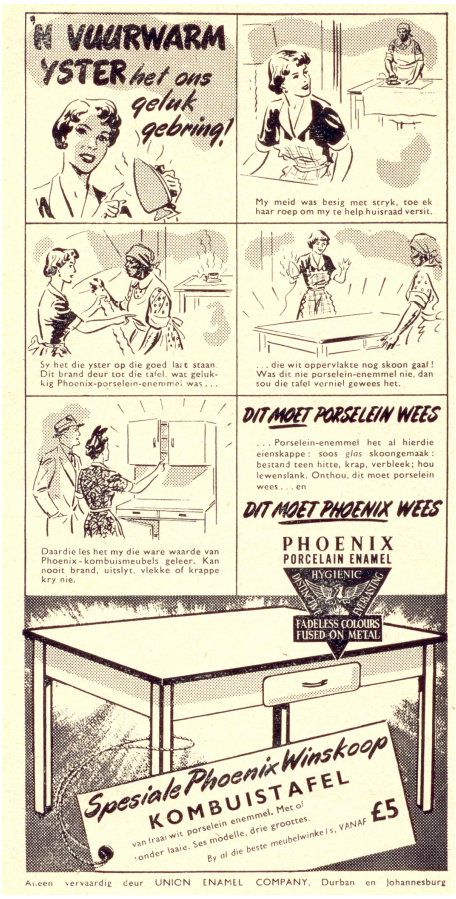


Figure 3.11 ***Phoenix porcelain enamel***

But there is also another level at play. The surface of the table on which the iron was placed emerges unscathed, thanks to its coating of *Phoenix porcelain enamel*. In this sense, one might say that the threat of the iron to the pristine white surface signifies the 'black threat' to the white 'civilizing mission.' Yet this threat is effaced and the table remains intact. On the one hand, white superiority is

thus affirmed, but on the other, the need to insulate against this 'threat of racial contamination' is communicated. The implication of the latter is two-fold. Firstly, whites, those with access to modernity – or the 'upholders of modernity' – are positioned as superior to blacks who threaten it. Secondly, it is through the commodity as product of modernity that whites are able to uphold their superior position, and they should thus continue to invest in its maintenance.

Something more or less along the same lines is active in the two advertisements for *Bon Ami* washing soap [Fig. 3.12-13]. As suggested by McClintock, the commodity often serves the function of disguising labour in advertising (127). In this sense, the black labour of the 'cleaning boy', is moved to the background, and it is *Bon Ami* that should be your only cleaner, as this "little bar of soap cleans better and more effectively than house boys who sometimes work so roughly and untidily". Through focusing on the fetish of the commodity, whites are able to disguise their dependence on and exploitation of black labour.

Figure 3.12 and 3.13 *Bon Ami* wash soap

The above illustrates the manner in which the commodity functions as a fetish of modernity in as much as it is simultaneously an outcome, or product of modernity, and serves to consolidate modernity. Now, to return to the notion of the trope of tradition and modernity, in the advertisement for *Robert Hamilton* [Fig. 3.14] the same sense of continuity is evoked as that in the advertisements relying on the juxtaposition between the ox wagon and automobile. By claiming the same values of speed and progress implied in the modernising of trade routes, while at the same time preserving the original character of the firm, that of excellence, *Robert Hamilton* draws on both the values of

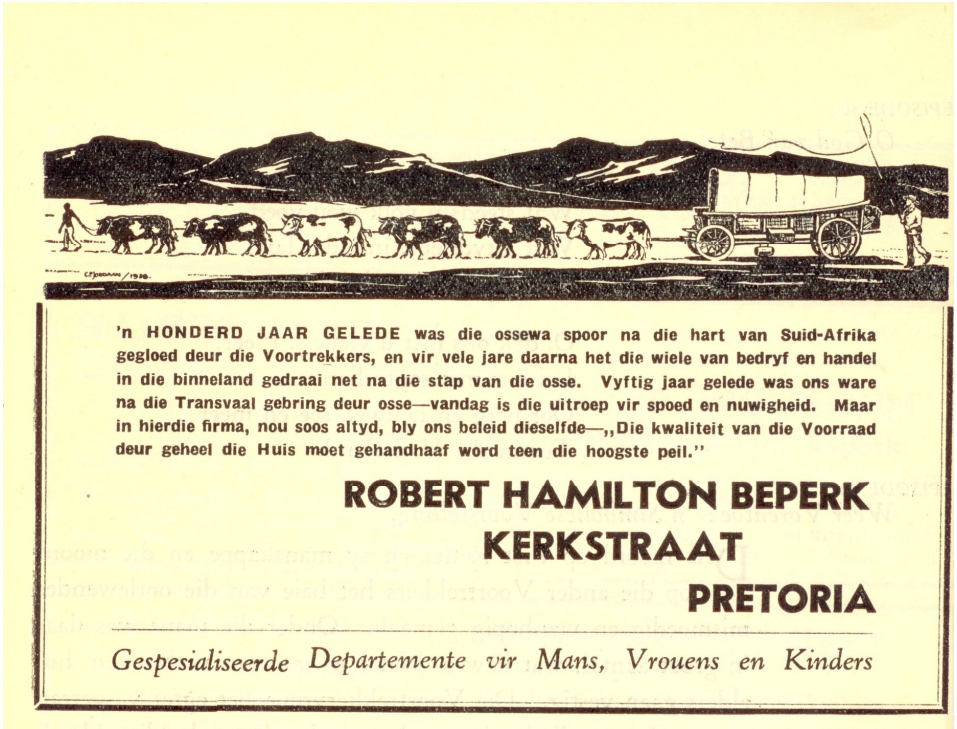


Figure 3.14 Robert Hamilton

tradition and modernity in order to endorse its product. But as a clothing merchant, this link is carried one step further, with the modern product offset against the traditional clothes of the Voortrekkers. The clothing trope was utilised in the broadest sense by a range of advertisements married to the image of the Voortrekkers in traditional attire. In the light of the importance attributed to the role of the clothing of the Voortrekkers in the construction of a national mythology, this trend will now be elaborated here.

In a chapter from the *1949 Voortrekker Monument* commemoration booklet, entitled "The Clothing worn by the Voortrekkers", Kestell claims that even though proper evidence as to what the Voortrekkers wore is lacking, from the descriptions that are available, "there is enough evidence in order to show just how neat their clothes were, as well as the excellence of the workmanship with which it was made" (123). She continues to provide a list of garments supposedly favoured by Voortrekker men:

> There was the black broadcloth cape and the swallow-tailed jacket with the broadcloth or cashmere flap-trousers. A fine white shirt was worn with these, a collar, broad bow- or knotted tie, a top hat and boots without holes for laces
>
> Concerning their daily wear, it is said that the most commonly used material was moleskin, velvet – corduroy or smooth: black, brown, green, dark yellow, blue nankeen with blue or red stripes…. Even the oldest materials used for jackets as well as waistcoats were wooly in appearance.
>
> As far as the women are concerned, in their clothes a little more variety and markers of personal taste is visible… Silk gowns of black, light brown… deep wine red, as well as black with light blue satin stripes… the middles taken in and the material pleated, and lined with the finest linen. (123)

The above-mentioned renders a vignette of the Voortrekkers, trudging inland through an 'untamed wilderness', fending off wild beasts and hostile natives, decked out in their Sunday best, in a splendid array of colours.[25] Emerging from the interior with their clothes intact, the clothing of the Voortrekkers is a marker of their level of civilization. McClintock describes the colonial white glove "as a fetish of class leisure" (229), and the "white handkerchief, [likewise], the Victorian icon of pure domestic purity and the erasure of signs of labour" (230). Similarly, the clothes of the Voortrekkers are being

[25]Granted, these might have been the clothes carried in the *wakis* (wagon-chest, in which precious items were kept), but the manner in which the above-mentioned is put, creates the impression that this was their everyday attire.

figured forth as a 'fetish of modernity' – as tangible markers of their level of cultural sophistication and as proof of their capabilities as craftsmen and women.[26]

Of course, portraying the Voortrekkers as refined, and their clothes as dainty, was an obvious counterstroke against remarks by the British, referring to the Boers as 'boorish' and unsophisticated, as well as ideas that Boer women were coarse, fat and unkempt; lazy not only in terms of their appearance, but with regard to their domestic duties too (Gilomee 309). Thus, remarks of the Boers as unkempt tied in with the degree to which they were regarded as culturally inferior by the British. One should not underestimate the impact that conceptions such as the following (made with reference to the Anglo-Boer war by a prominent British author) had on the collective Afrikaner psyche, in terms of a feeling of being culturally inferior:

> Never before had a large body of intelligent men been kept in a state of abject subjugation by an inferior race, a race so almost without elements of civilization, ignorant and brutal, beyond any existing white community. (qtd. in 309)

Presenting the Voortrekkers as well-dressed, in clothes that display their skill and craftsmanship, redeems the women's alleged indifference to household chores such as needlework. But more importantly, in a cultural climate permeated with the idea that a 'race' or a *volk*'s artistic accomplishments can serve as a measure for their 'spiritual evolution', the Voortrekkers' clothes were offered as tangible proof of an expression of their individuality and quality of workmanship. As claimed by Kestell:

> The highest level of craftsmanship is reached in the work on the linen *kappies.* These are not merely made through even stitching alone, but beautiful designs of hearts, diamonds, or a combination of all of these, and particularly the eye-catching designs of leaves and flowers which catch the eye. The clothing of the Voortrekkers stands testimony to their dignified and refined characters. (125)

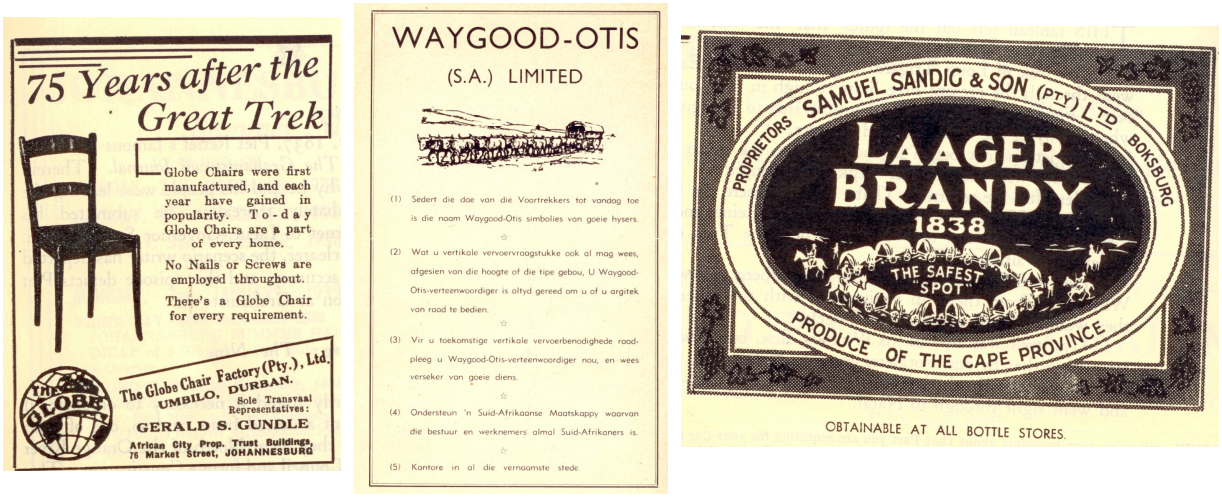
[26]Of interest here is also the debate regarding *Volkskuns* – or crafts by the Voortrekkers, which is also singled out as "evidence" of their refined manners and dignified characters.

The Voortrekkers' handiwork is thus positioned as proof of their 'spiritual evolution' as a people and of their legitimacy as the carriers of modernity, as adequate bearers of 'civilization' to the 'darkness' of the interior.

The invention of 'traditional attire' literally became a 'clothes hanger' fulfilling all sorts of purposes, the most far-flung of which was the increasing appearance of the image of a woman in traditional Voortrekker clothes in advertisements for clothing stores (such as demonstrated in Fig. 3.15 for example). This trope of traditional clothing was even taken as far as to advertise "100% Afrikaans" clothing [Fig. 3.16].

Figure 3.15 and 3.16 The circulation of the 'clothing trope'

In the same manner, the general figure of the trek was deployed by advertisements for products as diverse as *Global Furniture* [Fig. 3.17], *Waygood-Otis* [Fig. 3.18] and *Laager Brandy* [Fig. 3.19] – to name but a few producers who jumped on the band (or indeed the *ox*) wagon.



Figures 3.17-19 'Jumping on the ox wagon'

Mementos – from public to private: Owning a moment 'frozen in time'

I now proceed to an analysis of the mementos and souvenirs of these various 'rituals of citizenship'. As opposed to relying on the graphic content of advertisements or their implicit assumptions, as discussed in the previous section, this section will focus on the actual objects advertised (as well as others). In so doing, I turn to the second point of consideration proffered by Dorfles in the consideration of advertisements and kitsch, namely to "advertise objects or aspects which can be included in the kitsch ambiance" (180).

As the Voortrekker Monument serves as the image most often reproduced in the following images, a brief discussion of this 'primary symbol' of Afrikanerdom is merited. Since the focus has fallen largely on the *Tweede Trek* during the first half of this chapter, the topic of monuments per se perhaps deserves some attention, as these served to to

'cement' many of the invented traditions or kitsch myths discussed up to this point, and were indeed an important element in the nationalists' arsenal. Next to the *Tweede Trek,* the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument probably represents the second biggest 'mass national commodity spectacle' around which Afrikaner unity was mobilized [Fig 3.20].

Figure 3.20 The Voortrekker monument

> On a clear day, it is visible from over 40 km away. Gallant and proud, the Voortrekker Monument towers imposingly above its surrounds. As if planned, the suburbs of the capitol, the weapon arsenal of the South African army and the Swartkop military airport lies at its feet. (FAK 170)

Such is the praise with which the FAK's 1989 coffee table book on South African monuments lauds the Voortrekker monument. For my purposes, however, there could not have been a better illustration of the manner in which the modern apartheid state, its institutional apparatuses and its cordoning off of the territory of the suburbs to house its white citizens, was sanctioned by the invention of the traditional.

According to architect Gerhard Moerdijk, inspiration for the design of the monument was drawn from rock formations in Monument Valley in the USA, as well as from Egyptian architecture: "The structure of the Voortrekker Monument captures something of the vastness of the Egyptian people's architecture, in order to speak for the greatness of the Voortrekker people's achievements" (170). He continues: "The large, mighty dome which spans the circumference of the structure as a whole symbolizes the power and the scope of the trek and generates the overpowering impression of the significance of the Trek, as always incomplete, yet meaningfully rounded off" (170). Nevertheless, some would have it that the true source of his inspiration was in fact the *Völkerschlacht Denktmal* in Lepzig. This monument in commemoration of "the 1813 defeat of Napoleon by the Prussians and allies" (Drusus par.2) shares many of its features. Although a full analysis of these two structures will not be indulged here, see Fig. 3.21 for a comparison between them.[27]

[27] From such a purely visual comparison, it is clear that the Voortrekker Monument shares more than just a few characteristics with the *Völkerschlacht Denktmal*. But such obvious similarities aside, the *Völkerschlacht Denktmal* had a long history of being vested in German nationalism and pride (Drusus, par.2). It is a well-known fact that the Afrikaner ideologues of the 1930s and 1940s in many ways idealized the German people's longstanding tradition of nationalism, which it emulated in quite a few respects (Hopkins 34). Especially the strong current of "*völkish*" ideas in Germany, which emphasized a "*Volk*" or nation as having a historically unique character, rooted in their "common language, traditions, art, music, social customs, religion, blood and soil which united a particular Volk" (Zimmerman 8) had a strong resonance with these architects of Afrikaner nationalism. As put by Gilomee, it is not accurate to describe the Afrikaner Nationalists as proto-fascists, nor is this what I am arguing for. I merely wish to state that Afrikaners, desiring national unity, often admired and emulated the 'rituals of nationalism' of European nations, especially those of Germany.

Figure 3.21 The *Völkerschlacht Denktmal* (left) and the Voortrekker Monument (right) at a glance

As far as the Voortrekker monument's architecture is concerned, it is thus made up of an amalgam of outlandish styles, appropriated for their exotic or mythical connotations. An analysis of the interior is no less forgiving. At noon on 16 December of every year, sunlight falls directly upon a 'covenant altar' in the main hall through a hole in the overhead dome [see Fig. 3.21]. Directed, on other days, at each of the friezes depicting Voortrekker idols in the "hall of heroes" in turn, the sunlight symbolizes "God's blessing" on the Voortrekkers, celebrating their victory at the *Battle of Blood River* (170). The symbolic significance of the interior space therefore glorifies the kitsch myth of the Voortrekkers as being directed by divine providence. As put by Dorfles, "every time someone tries to set up a monument which is only the empty incarnation of a non-authentic [event or] sentiment, the result is kitsch" (82).

Considering the 'kitsch' status of the myths of Afrikaner nationalism discussed so far, it is hardly surprising that the creation of any monuments in celebration of nationalist purposes will not have any outcome other than kitsch. But other than the erection of monuments as orchestrated by state, more interesting, even, is the phenomena of monuments being erected almost 'spontaneously' post-1938, country-wide at a grass-roots level of organization. As opposed to the conception that all monuments glorifying Afrikaner nationalist ideologies are sanctioned and commissioned, planned and effected by state apparatuses, in order to impose its ideology on its citizens, in many instances this was not the case. In fact, many monuments today being written off as the most atrocious pieces of Nationalist propaganda ever conceived were often the brain-childs of local people, forming committees at grass-roots level, built from funding obtained from private donators and local businesses.

This 'self-made' aspect of many Afrikaner monuments has to be emphasized because as opposed to intervention by state, these were conceived by patriotic individuals. For example, the *Taalmonument* in Paarl, a tribute to the Afrikaans language, is the end result of "a seed… sown in the mind" of P.J. Loots, after visiting the grave of ds. S.J. du Toit, the "Father of the Afrikaans Language" (FAK 53). After contemplating the fate of the Afrikaans language and how he could contribute to Du Toit's legacy, he called the

"*Afrikaanse Taalmonument* committee" into life with the aim of the development of Afrikaans as language, as well as the creation of a proper monument in its honour. What is important is that, although in its final stages the project did "receive a generous contribution in funding from the state," initially it had to rely on private funding, "obtained from the various provinces, as well as South West Africa [now Namibia], schools, companies and various other private donators" (53).

The *Karel Landsman* monument in Alexandria commemorates the group of trekkers who set out from the Uitenhage district under Karel Landsman [Fig 3.22]. The monument, a globe 5m in circumference, depicts an ox wagon on its course over the 'empty earth' of the southern tip of Africa (66). The journey into the interior is elevated to global proportions, literally in the sense of 'today the interior, tomorrow the rest of world'. Moreover, it elevates the primitive wagon on a local quest to one floating across the earth, larger than life, where it enters the realm of global navigation and global importance. It involves a strange type of 'reversed imperialism', in which the progress-sion of a group of colonial pioneers is turned back on the rest of the world as the founding moment of 'a young nation' now ready to 'claim its place' amongst the nations of the world. Commissioned by a local, Mr. G.D.J. Aucamp, and on terrain donated by another local citizen, the cornerstone was laid on 16 December 1938, with a silver mason by a surviving niece – the

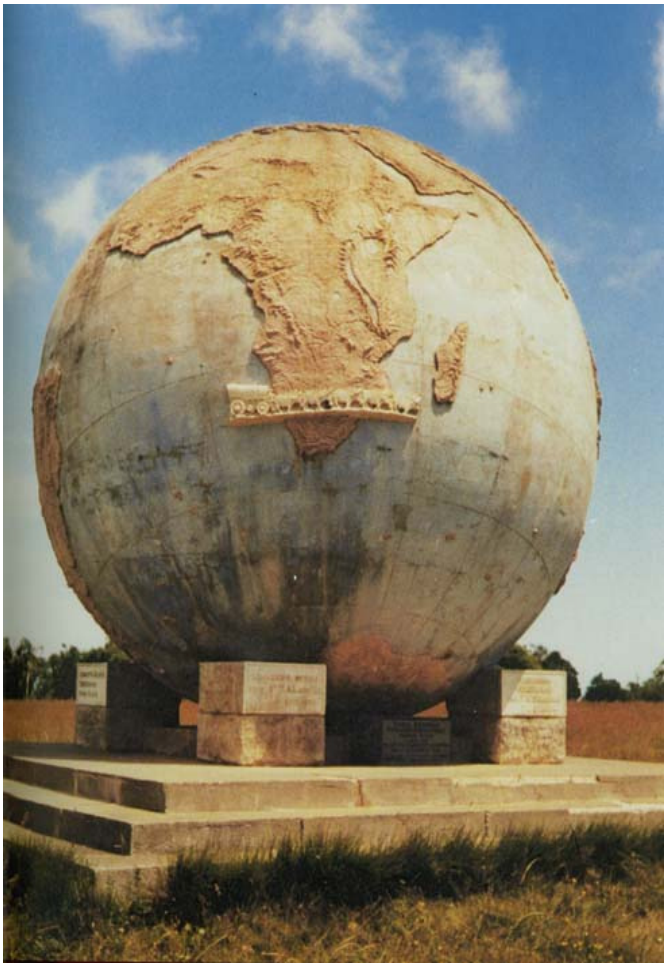


Figure 3.22 The Karel Landsman Monument

daughter of Landsman's youngest brother. All costs were carried by a Johannesburg firm, Gebrs. Lupini (66).

The Bible Monument was established in Grahamstown, where, during the course of April 1837, the party of Jakobus Uys was met by a group of 100 British settlers, while the party was camping just outside Grahamstown, en route into the interior. They were given the gift of a Dutch bible by the settlers, as a sign of respect for their reputed piety as a god-fearing people (69). This incident is also recalled by the *Voortrekkermonument 1949 Soewenier*-booklet, in an article entitled, "Die Godsdienssin van die Voortrekkers" (The religious piety of the Voortrekkers). Arguing that the *Voortrekkers*'s trek into the interior of South Africa was driven by more than just "the spirit of revolutionary insurrection", it claims that "in the *Voortrekker*-heart, something else, something higher burned like the sputtering of a fire. It was the staunch sense of religious piety of these people" (Van Rooyen 37). Recasting the trek in terms of the supposed piety of the Voortrekkers, supported by 'evidence' such as the incident mentioned above, this underscores the divine ordination of the Voortrekkers' 'civilizing mission'.

At the site where this exchange took place, a committee gathered on 16 December 1957 to lay a pile of bricks and propose plans for a monument. The monument itself, an open bible book, with two pages 5,5x11m in size, was built, facing in the same direction (measured as closely as possible with a magnetic compass) as that in which the Voortrekkers departed (FAK 69). Moreover, when the wagons passed through Grahamstown during the *Tweede trek,* a symbolic Bible was again handed over to the latter-day trekkers (once more illustrating the literalness with which these histories were both interpreted and enacted, as mentioned earlier in relation to the depiction of the "barefoot woman") (69). The completion of the Bible monument is described as "the life-long ideal of Mr Dirk J.J. Pretorius, who, as secretary of the Bible monument-committee, offered both his time and energy to the realisation of this project, and was its driving force" (69).

I have mentioned but three examples here, yet there are many other monuments that also 'sprang up' in this manner from the 1930s to the end of the appartheid era. They provide some sense of the extent to which the consolidation of nationalism effected by the *Tweede Trek* and the kitsch myths it endorsed pervaded the social sphere. This level of grass-roots involvement was characteristic at all levels of the *Tweede Trek*. For example, the tradititonal Voortrekker clothes worn by individuals who welcomed the wagons of the *Tweede Trek*, were clothes they had made themselves. The FAK distributed patterns widely along the course of the ox wagons during the 1938 centenary, and months before the final inauguration of the Voortrekker monument, patterns began to appear in the *Huisgenoot* for making your own, 'authentic' Voortrekker clothes.[28] Pages and pages were devoted to debating the exact way in which every item should be sewed in order for it to be an 'actual' replica of those worn by the Voortrekkers. People were cautioned in these articles against wearing improper accesories, such "a long coat instead of a proper shawl" and applying "too much make-up, which is not fitting for traditional Voortrekker clothes" (Kestell 39). They were even advised on picking the right shoes to go with their traditional attire (39).

What makes this level of participation so significant was that it was not the product of outright coersion, but instead involved a high level of individual involvement and rhizomatic organization. The articulation of official discoure at grass-roots level is also important when considering objects in imitation of these monuments, sold as souvenirs, once more pointing towards the involvement of individuals who shared these sensibilities.

For example, Fig. 3.23 is an advertisement which shows a serviette ring with the Voortrekker monument embossed upon it. Not only is the monument depicted on it an example of kitsch, glorifying a false myth in an alien formal style, but put on a serviette ring, the monument is reproduced in a context even further removed from its original context and expressed in a form alien to the original. What is more, these specific

[28]See *Die Huisgenoot*, 16 September 1949, p.52-53 "*Feesdrag vir 16 Desember*" ("Festive attire for 16 December").

mementos (such as the teaspoon which is also advertised) has the special feature of contributing to the "monument fund" via purchase of any of these objects, which is to be applied towards the conservation and renovation of national monuments. Thus, the buyer is enticed by the additional prospect of buying a 'share' in history. The initial pleasure of purchasing a souvenir as "memory fetish" – allowing the holder thereof access to a "moment frozen in time" (Giesz 156) – is therefore actualized by bestowing virtual 'partial ownership' of history unto the buyer.

Figure 3.23 "Owning a moment frozen in time".

The next object of discussion is a magnificently produced tray, also bearing the image of the Voortrekker monument [Fig. 3.24]. As with serviette ring and teaspoon in Fig 3.23,

Figure 3.24 How about some nationalism in your tea?

these are all objects to be used in the home. More specifically, as opposed to mere cutlery, cups and plates, they all signal a connection with the entertaining of guests. The tea-spoon, along with the tray, carry the connotations not of the single nationalist enjoying a cup of tea, but of having people over for tea, as is indeed a central part of Afrikaans culture, noted for its hospitality, or *gasvryheid.* Furthermore, the serviette-ring points to a dinner party, or at least an occasion for which the table is to be well set – indeed one of the items to be kept in the *vertoonkas* (display cabinet), along with the good china. Signaling one's political affiliations through these 'centrepieces' implies a shared community of opinions into which these ideological images can be assimilated unproblematically, and within which uniformity is fostered.

A second tray carries even more disturbing connotations in this regard. Fig. 3.25 is a tray with *The Battle of Blood River* literally 'portrayed' upon it. As the name suggests, it is a 'legend' marked by this very gory aspect of the victory concerned; that towards the end of the battle, the said river was purportedly coloured red by the blood of the fleeing Zulus. To be sure, it is a massacre which signals excess *par excellence*.

Figure 3.25 A portrayal of 'The Battle of Bloodriver'

Firstly, juxtaposing this image on the tray with a possible context in which food is to be served, clearly enters the realm of the obscene (as classically defined, that which should remain 'off stage', or regarded as beyond the limits of what is 'suitable' or 'proper' – or in this sense, that which is traditionally not regarded as suitable 'dinner table talk').[29] Secondly, the beautifully made tray, with its glossy finish and wrought silver-works, suggests a sense of value and luxury, emphasized by the heavy indigenous wood on which it is set. This further serves to anestheticize the violence of the scene on it, as well as the cannibalistic eating of food off its surface, literally the eating of one of the body parts sprawled across the face of the tray. In this sense, this object operates on the same level as that of the myth, in that they both serve the function of making violence acceptable. The myth serves the same function as the beautiful tray, in its mystification and legitimation of violence.

This violent scene, as with the other articles mentioned, is ultimately intended for the home. Thus ideology enters the private space of the home, where it structures social relations, as in the examples provided, where the sharing of food becomes the sharing of ideologies.

What is of importance in the section just discussed is the emphasis on everyday objects, rather than on the grand narratives of politics or their official fetishes – the national flag, coat of arms, or national anthem. These objects demonstrate how these ideologies are articulated in 'everyday discourse' in the private sphere. By demonstrating how these indeed trickle down into the most ordinary forms, illustrates the extent to which these ideologies permeated everyday levels of existence.

Before turning to a comprehensive examination of the 'modern home' in the next chapter, there is still the discussion of a last and personal favourite: the *kapstok* (coat and hat rack). The caption to this advertisement expresses, perhaps unwittingly, many of the characteristics of what makes kitsch *kitsch* [Fig 3.26]. As listed, the *kapstok* involves an

[29]In context of argument that kitsch serves as banishment of the Real, this could serve as an instance of reintroducing the Real to conversation. Yet, the "Real" is included only in its mythified form, and as such it thus serves the function of supporting the reigning ideology, as opposed to tearing a hole in it.

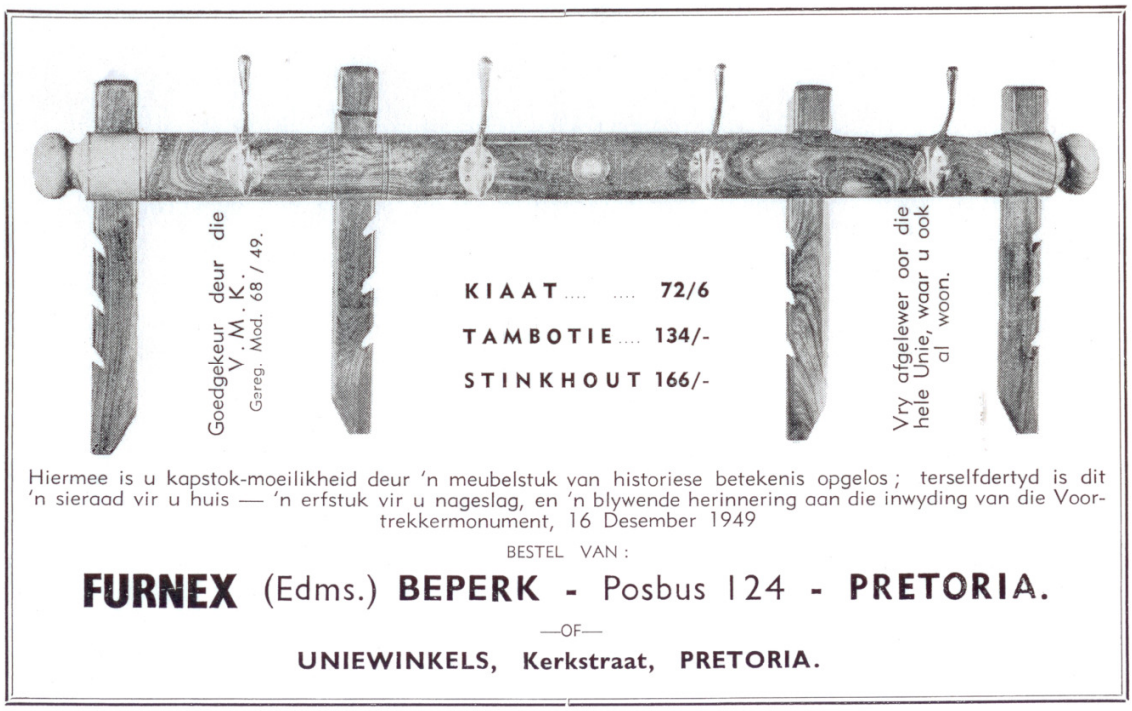


Figure 3.26 The Kapstok

amalgam of the most disparate notions (and not in a manner that would qualify it as eclectic.) In the first place, it is described as "an ornament to adorn the home, a heirloom to posterity, as well as a lasting reminder of the inauguration of the Voortrekker monument in 1949". To begin with, the mixture of two disparate elements; a yoke and a *kapstok*, also illustrates the mismatched pairing on the next level. The obvious irony is that it is not a real yoke used in the actual trek,[30] but the mere association with the 'legend' of the Voortrekkers bestows on it the status of a true antique – a "family heirloom". Moreover, personal and private are mixed, not only in ideology entering the home as described above, but also in as much as family genealogy and national history become conflated. Like the story of the family that is 'handed down', as embodied in the object of the family heirloom, the nation-as-family 'passes down' its legitimating narratives and preserves its myths through events such as the inauguration of the Voortrekker monument. Furthermore, if considered from the angle of the use of the *kapstok* as that of a place for hanging your coat or hat, it is also a site of exchange

[30]As the yoke itself looks pretty pristine, as if it was produced in the factory only yesterday, showing no sign of the ravages of time, or the 'blood and sweat' vested in the trek seems strangely absent from its surface.

between private roles – by leaving the home and taking coat or hat for work, school or church – and public ones.

These 'mementos' moreover exemplify what McClintock refers to as "the modern compulsion to collect time in the form of an object" and of "history as palimpsest" (377). This is emphasized by Giez's mentioned notion of the memento as an attempt at the "collection of time, frozen in an object" (156). Furthermore, the specific mementos under discussion share the following characteristic: rather than simply commemorate a past event, the objects involve the simultaneous 'invention' and 'commemoration' of history (in much the same manner as the events they represent or to which they refer). The inventions of Afrikaner nationalism signal the writing of history as an erasure of one element by another, as referred to by McClintock, *par excellence*.

It is also significant here to consider Benjamin's notion of the character of the present as "both the moment and the site of the actuality of the past" (Benjamin and Osborne xii). As such, the past is dependent upon "the action of the present: every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own, threatens to disappear irretrievably" (xiii). This idea is elaborated as follows:

> Such a present holds itself apart from chronology. It cannot be defined as a mere point in time. It is not the *nunc stance*. Rather, it is the result of a complex act of temporalization which is always contested… It is through such wrestling that both tradition and the present are constituted. The present is constituted in the destruction and reconstitution of tradition. As the temporality of history is rethought under the pressure of such a conception of the present, so this rethinking comes to define the present (this present, now) philosophically (xii).

This, then, is also at stake in the way in which history is approached within the consolidation of apartheid nationalism, in respect of which the negotiation of tradition proceeded through the constitution of a present where some meanings were favoured and others foreclosed. As opposed to the potential dynamism of such a practice, where "in every era the attempt has to be made anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism

that is about to overpower it" as a means of freeing the present from the constraints of the past, this "destruction and reconstitution" of history (in terms of erasing some meanings in favour of others), took the shape of fixing the present within an ideological constellation of meanings, dependent upon tradition being reframed within a certain way (xii).

To conclude, this chapter has aimed to describe kitsch in terms of such foreclosures, referring to the kitsch myth as well as the invented rituals of nationalism as characteristically modern phenomena. This has been demonstrated across a range of contexts, from the public rituals of nationalism to the articulation of these nationalistic sentiments within the realm of the 'everyday' and also, in the final instance, within the intimate sphere of the home.

In the following chapter, this shift will be elaborated upon. As observed earlier by Sontag, one can capture the 'ideas' or 'behaviour' of a particular period without ever touching on the sensibilities that informed these (276). Having established the myths active in shaping the grand political discourses of the apartheid state during its initial stages, I will be looking specifically at the sensibilities expressed by individuals in the privacy of their own homes, in an attempt at capturing the "underlying sensibility of the period" (276).

In elaborating upon this shift away from the public to the private in respect of apartheid kitsch, the modern suburban home will be treated as the crucible in which the sensibilities underlying the apartheid era were expressed. This will be done by looking at kitsch in the form of the uniform characteristics of the modern home's structural façade and interior, as well as the values expressed through the collection of objects that the home often comes to 'house'. This will be read, moreover, in the broader context of the idea of modern nostalgia and the longing for a perceived 'lost authenticity'. I will consider how this tension between the 'authentic' and the 'inauthentic' is played out actively within the modern home.

The modern home takes shape within the opposition between the land, as the Afrikaner's perceived original 'lost home', and the city as its counterpart, in which the suburbs emerge as an uneasy limbo. The uniformity of the suburbs insulates middle-class values and deeply entrenches notions of whiteness, yet, at the same time, engenders the need for escape. Paradoxically, this is done by longing for the 'exotic' or the 'primitive', which at the same time reintroduces the sense of 'otherness' disavowed in constructions of whiteness, but in a contained and domesticated version that is ultimately produced for display only, in the context of the home. This chapter will also demonstrate, in the final instance, how the location of the modern home (the white suburb, cordoned off by the Group area's act) and the white Afrikaner family who inhabit it (as a site for ensuring racial purity) converge to communicate very specific meanings of whiteness, enforced by the kitsch in the modern home.

CHAPTER FOUR

Apartheid kitsch: Kitsch, craft and the modern home

From public to private

The tension between public and private has already been set up to some degree in the previous chapter, by considering the extent to which ideology enters the modern home via objects that render the boundaries between the public and private sphere quite permeable. In the present chapter, this move will be elaborated upon, as it will focus specifically on this "shift from the public to the intimist domestic view" (Goldblatt 31).

To begin with, what would be at stake in evaluating apartheid through the lens of the modern home – especially the white suburban home? As opposed to the grand events and political perturbations of the public sphere, the private home is characteristically uneventful. However, as noted by the South African photographer, David Goldblatt, who documented the lives of South Africans under apartheid, he felt no need to "record those situations and moments of extremity" in which big newspaper editors and an international audience were interested. Rather he felt himself drawn "to the quiet and commonplace, where nothing 'happened' and yet all was contained and immanent" (7). Moreover, in his examination of the "expression of people's values, and how they were expressed", Goldblatt came to the conclusion that "headline events were the culmination of underlying conditions anyway" (31).

It is in this sense as well that I turn to an investigation of the modern home in this chapter – the realm of the 'quiet and commonplace' where nothing 'happens', so to speak – but indeed the realm which contains the 'expression of people's values', and that signals the underlying cultural sensibilities which often culminate in grand political events.

Although it is relatively easy to touch on the 'big events' – the intellectual or social history of a period – this is not the case, as Sontag points out, when it comes to trying to

capture something of the sensibilities that informed these events (276). This is true, even if kitsch could be demonstrated to be one of the most pervasive characteristics of South African homes during the apartheid era.[31] The reason for this is that even though the sensibility of an era is its "most decisive aspect", it is also its most perishable (276). In her opinion, therefore, studies which "do tell us something about the sensibility of a period" are rare (276).

This elusive quality is thus the first thing that I will need to address in attempting precisely such a study. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, part of the very definition of kitsch is its supposed 'imp-like quality' that makes it hard to pin down, but there is also an additional consideration at play. If the sensibility of a particular era is expressed in those features that literally characterized that era, these are hardly static. And if concerned with how this sensibility played itself out in the modern home, this not a static zone either. Houses do not look the same as they did some forty or fifty years ago. Considering the fleeting nature of kitsch, what is 'fashionable' or conventional today will not be the same tomorrow. And even if these point to 'what everyone remembers', for someone who has not been there, an inventory of kitsch items or interiors are hard to come by. These are hardly the stuff of history books or museums.

Although this is of course in keeping with our theme of scouring the rubbish bins of history rather than its 'proud achievements', this does not address the problem of what the actual objects of analysis will comprise. On the one hand, I will refer to actual examples of kitsch, specifically how kitsch finds expression in the uniform characteristics of the modern home's structural façade and interior, as well as the values expressed through the collection of objects that the home often comes to 'house'. Yet, considering that kitsch is what has passed by, but also what in many ways persists, I wish to refer to Proust's notion of a trace. For him, a trace refers to that which cannot fully be realized at the moment of contact (qtd. in Foster 261). Therefore I will also consider kitsch as evidenced in 'traces' that have been solidified in 'descriptions' – such as songs or narrative extracts, for example. To illustrate the above-mentioned, I wish to refer briefly

[31] See Bynard 50, Hopkins, 16-17.

to Gabriel García Márquez's José Buendía (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), who becomes obsessed with taking random exposures with the daguerreotype camera, in which he hopes – in an unsuspecting moment – eventually to catch God on film as scientific proof of his existence. Indeed, I will treat these descriptions as photographs, which are to provide us with a snapshot of the 'ghost' (or in this case, of a sensibility).

My analysis will therefore alternately focus on actual objects, and on how these characteristics have been 'solidified' – how 'snapshots' of this sensibility are provided in various mediums such as narrative descriptions, songs or photographs. Thus, as suggested by Benjamin, I will attempt to "blaze a way into heart of things abolished or superseded, in order to decipher the contours of the banal as a picture puzzle" (212). Benjamin continues:

> Picture puzzles, as schemata of dreamwork, were long ago discovered by psychoanalysis. We, however, with a similar conviction, are less on the trail of the psyche than on the track of things. We seek the totemic tree of objects within the thicket of… history. The very last - the topmost - face on the totem pole, is that of kitsch. (212)

I turn now to things "in order to decipher the contours of the banal as a picture puzzle", to draw up a schemata of the sensibilities underlying the 'dreamwork' of the interiors and façades of the apartheid era. Here I will refer specifically to Fig. 4.1, which was illustration in an article on South African kitsch (Bynard 47). The image itself contains an amalgam of kitsch forms that featured prolifically during the apartheid era, woven together in a surreal, dreamlike manner. And like the dreamlike weaving together of kitsch features in this picture, I will evoke these as the 'picture puzzle of the banal' – the background images to the dreams this era dreamt for itself.

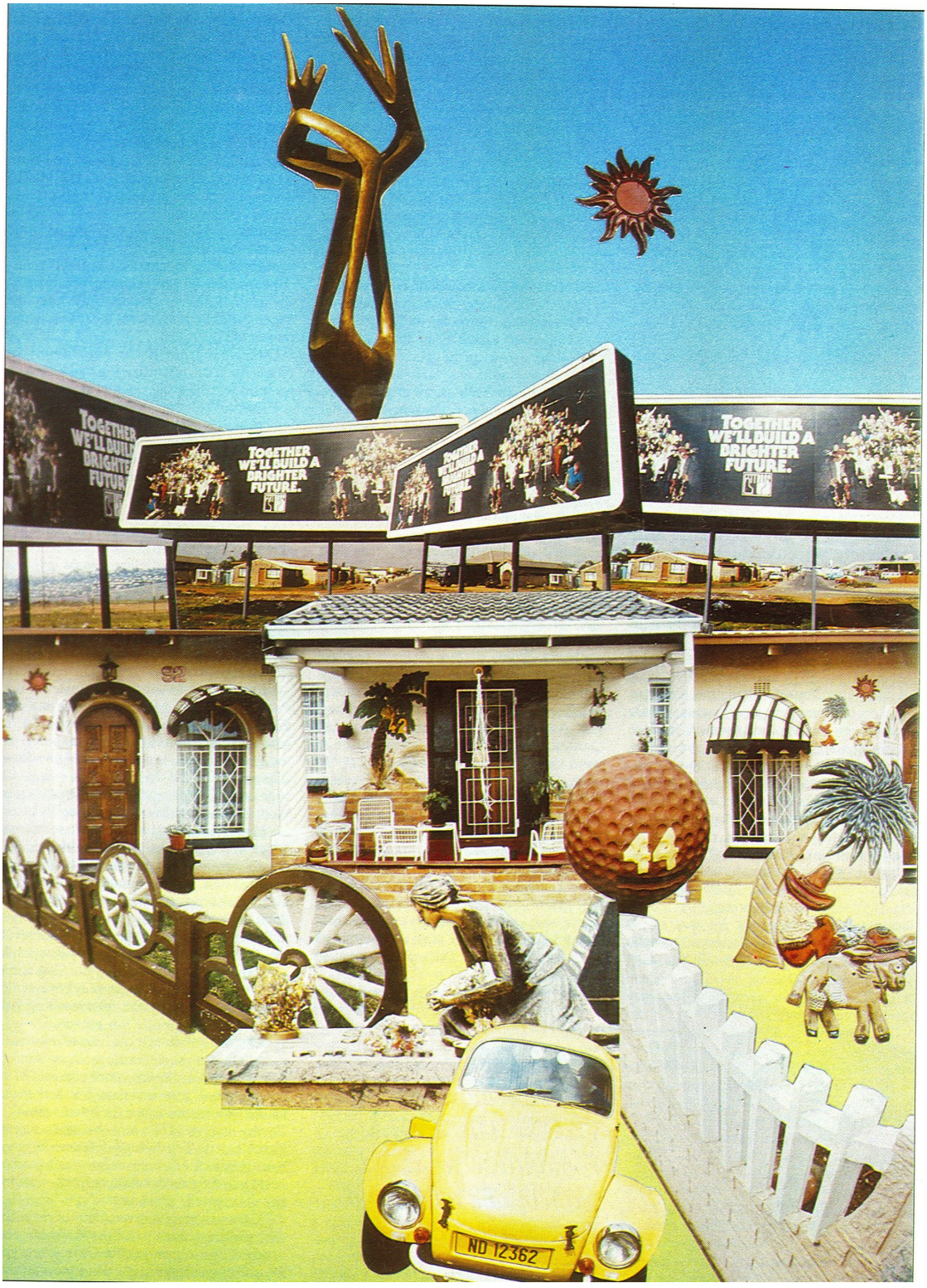


Figure 4.1 De Kat illustration: "The dreams the apartheid era dreamt for itself"

As stated by Bynard in the *De Kat* of December 1987, we will be "talking about the Randfontein-rococo or the Brakpan-/ Belville-barok" (46). We will also be

> speaking the language of the average suburban resident's unquenchable passion for the mail-order catalogue. [We will be] speaking the language of the wagon wheels and the proteas in the asbestos hedge, of golf ball postboxes, ceramic Mexicans underneath sombreros against the wall…. The language of kitsch. It [will follow us] past the wooden-cut or slate with "The Botha's live here" upon it, into the entrance hall with its dead flower arrangement… [where] the painted ostrich egg from Oudshoorn, next to the Venus de Milo on the piano add their voices to the chorus. (46)

While on the 'track of things', however, one has to keep in mind that, as stated by Benjamin, the very notion of the interior itself can be brought back to the split between private and public, as effected by the rise of the modern state. According to him, with the rise of democracy during the eighteenth century, "the private individual makes his entrance on the stage of history" for the first time (8). Thus, to return to the original contention of kitsch as a specific product of modernity, it has to be noted that so, too, is the manifestation of the private modern home, in which:

> the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office. The private individual, who in the office has to deal with reality, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. The necessity is all the more pressing, since he has no intention of allowing his commercial considerations to impinge on social ones. In the formation of his private environment, both are kept out. From this arise the phantasmagoria of the interior – which, for the private man, represents the universe. In the interior he brings together the far away and the long ago. His living room is a box in the theater of the world. (8-9)

What Benjamin refers to as the "phantasmagoria of the interior" is a consequence of this split. "Around this time," Benjamin comments, "the real gravitational centre of living space shifts to the office. The irreal centre makes its place in the home" (9). And it is in

this 'irreal centre' that *things* come to assume a central importance. As Benjamin rightly maintains, the "true resident of the interior" is the collector:

> [The collector] makes his concern the transfiguration of things. To him falls the Sisyphean task of divesting things of their commodity character by taking possession of them. But he bestows on them only a connoisseur value, rather than a use value. The collector dreams his way not only into a distant or bygone world, but also into a better one – one in which, to be sure, human beings are no better provided with what they need in the everyday world, but one in which things are freed from the drudgery of being useful. (9)

As such, Benjamin observes, "the house becomes an expression of the personality. Ornament is to this house what the signature is to the picture" (9). This lends further substantiation to the decision to treat the modern home as the expression of the private individual's sensibilities. For the latter, the interior is not just his or her universe, but also the realm in which they literally store themselves. Benjamin elaborates:

> [t]o dwell means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated. Coverlets and antimacassars, cases and containers are devised in abundance; in these, the traces of the inhabitant are imprinted in the interior. (9)

What, then, is at stake in examining kitsch through the lens of the modern home? In the first place, it leads us away from the public to the private sphere, to the realm where fugitive and fleeting sensibilities are expressed. As demonstrated above, the modern home stands coterminous to modernity, but more than that, the very notion of the 'home' also forms the centre of a series of discursive constellations within modernity. In the second place, these constellations particularly interest me, as it is here where some of the contradictions inherent within modernity loom especially large. I have in mind here the notions of modern nostalgia and the fetishization of the authentic, both of which refer to a longing for a 'lost home' as characterises the onset of modernity. The result of these contradictions is inevitably kitsch, which furthermore often finds expression in the very objects intended *for* the home.

Now, as observed by Bynard, one has to keep in mind that "kitsch exists in every Western society, it is not limited or exclusive to South Africa" (50). Nevertheless, in considering how this international phenomenon comes to bear on a local context, what will be examined is how these contradictions are articulated in locally specific ways, reaching interesting oppositions and productive tensions. In other words, the local course of modernity will be highlighted in the locally specific forms of kitsch considered. In addition to providing a starting point from which to embark on 'the trail of a sensibility', and an entry point into the contradictory discursive constellations within modernity, the modern home as conceptual point of organization also offers a reading that raises the questions of "whom, what and where", thereby enabling the specific type of contextualization upon which this thesis depends.

The question of "where" introduces the physical location of the suburban home, as well as the concept of land, considering the importance this latter notion had in the ideological construction of Afrikaner nationalism. The question of "what" refers to the structural façade of the home, as well as the objects intended for it, and these kitsch features clearly express how modern nostalgia gives rise to the longing for the authentic, paradoxically leading to the 'inauthentic' generation of the authentic. Thirdly, asking "who" inhabits the modern home, allows for the family to be brought to the fore.

As concerns the more general question of who is allowed to be 'at home' in modernity, on the one hand – as will be demonstrated with reference to the invention of the primitive – the idealization of earlier lifestyles is indeed an acute strategy to power keeping others locked in a timeframe that is located outside modernity. More specifically, however, the home is synonymous with the modern family, and kitsch in the home often glorifies domesticity. When considering these expressions of 'family values', it will be demonstrated how the two notions of land and family converge in the modern Afrikaner home, where both the Group Areas Act and the family – as a site of guarding against racial miscegenation – functioned together in ensuring racial purity. The anxious contradictions that this gives rise to is paved over by kitsch, as the kitsch in the Afrikaner

home – more than merely expressing the conventional and the sentimental – will be demonstrated as also deeply vested in certain notions of whiteness.

Having outlined these concerns, I will start by examining these "debates within modernity" with the notion of the home at the centre – the first of which will be that of modern nostalgia.

The modern home and modern nostalgia

As stated by Bendix, the notion of property has loomed large in debates surrounding the negotiation of tradition and modernity since the eighteenth century. Humanist critiques of commercialization regarded

> the relationship between a owner and his property [as]… a source at once of personal identification and social stability [insofar as] ownership of the land confers on the proprietor rights and privileges which give him status in the community and can be obtained by inheritance only, not by purchase. (297)

The above-mentioned expressed a more or less "benign view of tradition" in which these supposed "inalienable, prescriptive rights" were associated with "the benevolence of paternalistic rule", as well as "the warmth of personal relations and the sense of personal belonging, made possible by a closely knit, hierarchic community" which these not only enabled but also served to uphold (298). "Against this mythical image of the past," says Bendix, "the commercialization of property appears as a decay of civilization" (298). In the dialogic construction of tradition and modernity, tradition is therefore often evoked – but only in terms of the extent to which it serves as a nostalgic point of reference.

In the modern era, this additional component is often added to the notion of nostalgia, which endows it with considerable complexity. As opposed to simply a longing for earlier times, or the traditions of the past, consider Hall and Bombardella's definition of modern nostalgia as not only "a longing for a home that no longer exists", but a longing

for a home which has "perhaps never existed" – as in modern times nostalgia becomes grafted onto the "spiritual vacuum" associated with the onset of modernity (1). In this sense:

> modern nostalgia is mourning for the impossibility of a mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for the absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history. (1)

Like the modern myth discussed in Chapter Three, modern nostalgia also gives rise to kitsch. Calinescu too speaks of kitsch's "nostalgic quality", saying that "kitsch is nothing else than an escape into the idyll of history where set conventions are still valid" (239). To him, kitsch is the "simplest and most direct way of soothing this nostalgia" (239). It replaces "historical or contemporary realities with clichés", clearly feeding this emotional need (239). Moreover, Calinescu explains, the pleasure derived from this "wish-fulfilling quality" highlights the reactive origin of kitsch as a "response to the widespread modern sense of spiritual vacuum", the empty time of which it has to fill (251).

In a sense, modern nostalgia coincides with the notion of the invented tradition referred to in the previous chapter. More generally, however, this points towards a typically modern characteristic in which the contradictions within modernity, as a linear progress narrative, are highlighted. This will be looked at more closely when considering how this notion of modern nostalgia came to bear on the South African landscape, taking the shape of an opposition between the city and the country.

The city and the country – the importance of land in the negotiation of the Afrikaner's modern political identity

The relation between the city and the country is especially pertinent when considering the extent to which modern nostalgia was amplified by the increasing urbanization of many whites during the 1930s. In this sense, the longing for a mythical return becomes grafted

onto the yearning for a perceived lost rural past for, as Hall and Bombardella explain, "[t]he projection of a lost mythical world will inevitably be drawn to heritage – material remnants of the past that can be re-imbued and saturated with associations and interpretations" (1). In the case of the newly urbanized Afrikaner, 'land' – as embodied, generally, by the *platteland* (the country), or more specifically by the *plaas* (the farm) – became the signifier to which these nostalgic associations were attached. Within this framework, 'the city' emerges as its antipode, and the suburbs as an uneasy limbo, in which the Afrikaner is 'ill at home' in the modern home.

The modern home, as a result, occupies a troubled space between the loss of a supposedly 'authentic past', and the 'alienation' of the present which bestows an 'inauthentic' urban identity on the Afrikaner. Yet, if one considers that both the notions of an 'authentic past' and an 'inauthentic present' are constructions – in the sense that they do not refer to an empirically verifiable reality but are set up in terms of each other – they function as unstable signifiers. The modern home therefore emerges as a locus of identification in often contrasting and interesting ways from the opposition between 'the land' (as marker of tradition) and 'the city' (as marker of modernity), as a result of the extent to which this pairing was sometimes actively drawn upon, and at other times disavowed, in the negotiation of modern Afrikaner identity.

The notion of land looms large in the construction of the Afrikaner identity. As McClintock suggests, rituals of nationalism – such as the *Tweede Trek* discussed during the previous chapter – derived their potency in part from the fact that not only did they "evoke a resonant archive of popular memory and spectacular iconography of historical travail and fortitude… providing the historical dimension necessary for national invention, but also a theatrical stage for the collective acting out of the traumas and privations of industrial dislocation" (376). The reason why national spectacles like the *Tweede Trek* were so successful is because they spoke to the feelings of despair, disorientation, and economic insecurity felt by many Afrikaners "who had recently trekked from the rural areas to work the mines, railways and sweatshops of urban South Africa" (376). It is therefore no surprise that the idea for the *Tweede Trek* originated

amongst the cultural cadres of the *Broederbond*, a society founded primarily for the protection of white economic interests.

The above-mentioned illustrates the extent to which the notion of land serves as an animating political reveille, able to rouse emotion and stir up sentiments in no small way. Jeremy Foster, too, emphasizes the importance of the relation to land, referring to Afrikaner Nationalism as a "territorial narrative" par excellence (252). According to him, the myths of Afrikanerdom are in essence a "spatial story", relying on a "series of historical episodes to appropriate the geography of the subcontinent as their own imaginative territory" (252). In this sense, Foster regards the *Tweede Trek* as the "triumphant reinscription" of an "alternative narration of the historical time-space of the subcontinent – which began with the trekboers during the Dutch East India Company period, continued with the Voortrekkers' journey from the Eastern Cape into the Highveld interior, and included the Battle of Bloodriver in the Natal Midlands" – culminating in the re-creation of the Great Trek in 1935 (252-253).

Afrikaners often relied on an identification with the land as a primary means of constructing identity as traditionally a rural people, not given to strange or outlandish (*volksvreemde*) ideas, but who are humble and down-to-earth in their ways. As such, 'the land' signalled certain codes of belonging, as well as the intactness of an originary claim of a people who defined themselves primarily as 'belonging to the land'.

What is more interesting, however, is that since the 1930s, at the other end of the spectrum, this was increasingly balanced by a people claiming a newly urbanized identity – as opposed to a traditional rural identity such as the one rendered above, which in some instances was even pointedly disavowed. As pointed out by Powell:

> prior to the massive upsurge of nationalist ideology that culminated in the Great Trek centenary celebrations in 1938 and the consecration of the primary symbol of Afrikaner nationalism, the Voortrekker monument, Afrikaners were more characteristically referred to as Boers, and their former political homes in the Transvaal and Orange Free State as Boer Republics. (23)

Constructing a political identity with being a '*boer*' as its central point of reference lays emphasis on specific type of relationship to the land, i.e. through the actual physical activity of farming, which signals a direct relationship to the land, as well as a specific form of landownership – that of "*baasskap*".[32] Yet this traditionally rural political identity increasingly did not sit well with Afrikaner political ambitions, as the following incident illustrates.

In 1969, a collection six photographs by David Goldblatt, entitled 'The Afrikaners', was published in *Camera,* a Swiss photographic journal (Goldblatt 15). These depicted an array of Afrikaners in their everyday milieu, attempting to provide a 'slice of life' from the lives of the ordinary people behind the scenes of the official workings of the apartheid apparatus. This was however, met with an outcry in the Afrikaans press, soliciting headlines such as *Bloed sal kook oor die foto's* ("Blood will boil over these pictures"), in which critics poured out their scorn over the pictures in the collection – specifically one taken of a rural Afrikaner couple pictured in their living room [Fig. 4.2]. Claiming that light was manipulated to make the woman "look fat, slatternly and bedraggled, with harsh, unforgiving lines about the mouth", while her husband is "misrepresented through use of this same type of formal manipulation" as "a staring idiot, who is unshaven and frumpily dressed" – these photographs were made out to be "an utterly offensive smear campaign" against Afrikaners, rendering them in a manner that is "simply incredible" (Powell 19).

Figure 4.2 One of the challenged photographs

These remarks are founded in the anxieties over the image of the Afrikaner as unsophisticated, as expressed with reference to the clothes of the Voortrekkers in the

[32]Characterizing oneself as the owner of the land, as opposed to those who merely work it, ironically sets up a distance between the owner of the land and those who actually engage in the supposed "direct relationship" with the land that is claimed by the "*baas*" of the "*plaas*."

previous chapter. They reintroduce all the stereotypes of the fat, unkempt *boeretannie* and the dull, boorish Afrikaner man, which Afrikaners actively tried to deflect. Yet, these considerations aside, Powell maintains that

> the biggest problem with these photographs, was that they, 'essentially, were sociologically backward looking, focusing on the *platteland*, on farming communities and so-called poor whites, rather than the brave new world of Sanlam, Naspers and the Anton Rupert Empire. The image that the Afrikaners were looking to find themselves was of a new urban elite taking its (rightful) place among the 'European' nations of the world. (22)

For the achievement of the above-mentioned image, "they were fully prepared to rewrite history and bulldoze their path over the most bizarre of inconsistencies" (22). Indeed, "such a bold intervention in the fabric of reality led… to anxious contradictions", according to Powell, such as the fact of "their empirically historical identity as, largely, rural subsistence farmers and as a creole underclass in the history of colonization" (25). Thus "at the moment they embraced themselves as mythically projected beings; [their fear] was of the ambivalences in their own histories" (25).

This leads to a complex situation in which 'land' as a signifier is both idealized *and* banished; idealized in the sense that it serves to stand for a sense of belonging (as the forge in which human beings born into a fostering country start to "resemble the land," as described by Krog),[33] and banished in so far as it in actual fact also signifies the less than glamorous image of a poor, backward people having to fight a hostile environment for survival. Hence, the rural (or 'traditional') is evoked, but only retroactively, in the sense that a rural identity is nostalgically yearned for only *after* modernization had been

[33]"Men can be assimilated by a country. There is an x and a y in the air and the soil of a country, which slowly permeate and assimilate him to the type of aboriginal inhabitant, even to the point of slightly remodeling his physical features. The fostering country somehow gets under the skin of those born in it" (Jung, qtd. in Krog 29).

achieved – to serve as a foil against which the latter (i.e. 'how far we have come') is measured.[34] As put by Powell:

> the land as the forge in which the spirit is shaped, the site of conflict, its melancholy inscribed in its absence, is a constant and pervasive motive force, and as such it questions and subverts the Afrikaner elite's amnesiac wish perception of the Afrikaner people, highlighting at the same time a familiar conflict – between memory and forgetting (25).

This was essential to, but also complicated, their attempts "to see themselves as separate people, rather than recognize entanglements of lives and place" (27).

The above-mentioned denial, especially of their entanglements with the lives of others, becomes pertinent when keeping in mind that the making of colonial modernities is always centred around the place it assigns to others. As mentioned in Chapter Three with regards to the modernization paradigm, this depended on keeping natives in a 'primitive' state, and casting the colonialists as masters who are to 'lord over them', as they are not capable of sustaining modern ways of living or governing by themselves. Yet, as Foster points out, "the wishful dimensions of this vision, which was only sustainable as long as Africans remained content to live in rural reserves, missions and farms, were clear from the outset" (312). Seen in this light, the "alienation felt as a result of recent displacements" pointed towards the nostalgia for 'belonging' or a 'lost home', but for one which perhaps never existed in the first place – what McClintock refers to as "the crisis of colonial legitimacy" (281). This she explains as follows:

> A colonial culture… is one which has no memory. Cut off from the metropolis and strangely arrogant of the indigenous culture, estranged from all tradition, the colonial is marooned in time bereft of history… The colonial intruder… cannot find words to fit the landscape… The effort to give voice to a landscape that is felt to be unspeakable because

[34]Importantly, as Foster points out, "[i]n addition to J.M. Coetzee, several historians have noted that Afrikaners paid little attention to landscape until their ties with the land were being severed and the end of the rural *boere nasie* seemed likely" (255). As such, "displacement from the land became one of the key tropes used by nationalist ideologues to construct an Afrikaner mythology during the 1920s and 1930s. According to this historiography, being ejected from a previously owned cultivated domain was a defining experience of being an Afrikaner" (255).

> it inhabits a different history creates deep confusion, a kind of panic, which can be warded off, only by adopting the most extreme kind of defense measures. (281)

Defence measures, which depended on attempting to cover up 'the most bizarre inconsistencies' and 'anxious contradictions' in the construction of Afrikaner identity, as mentioned by Powell and described in the above-mentioned incident. Moreover, the other obvious, glaring inconsistency is that the longing for a 'home that was' seems especially rich in light of the fact that the Afrikaner's sense of 'urban displacement' was in fact cast against processes already in place that would soon effect the actual dispossession and displacement of thousands of native peoples.

The nostalgia for the 'authentic'

The nostalgia for an earlier, more rural form of life is by no means unique the to South African context, as feelings of alienation in the face of growing industrialization and urbanization were a characteristic response to modernization the world over. Importantly, in addition to an idealization of previous forms of landownership and community, this also often expressed itself as a longing for the 'authentic'. Chapter Two described how, since the eighteenth century, the nostalgia for what was perceived as a lost 'authentic existence' expressed itself as a passion for handmade objects and pre-industrial forms of production, as well as an aversion to any sign that betrayed the marks of the industrialization and the process of mass production (Steiner and Phillips 12-13).

Concerning the modern home, as well as the objects received within it, it should be emphasized to what extent the modern home became one of these points of reception onto which the above-mentioned discourse of authenticity was inscribed – particularly in the manner in which the supposed 'authentic rural home' was contrasted with the 'abstract sameness of the cities'. Yet, this extended far wider, coming to bear on the actual objects intended for the home, juxtaposing 'industrial spawn' with the 'hand-made' or the 'original.' Before these are discussed in greater detail, however, I will start by first investigating how this 'fetishization of the authentic' is expressed with reference to the outward appearance of the modern home, starting with its structural façade, before

we move inside towards a consideration of the interior, as well as an in-depth consideration of the concepts introduced.

Artist R. Gwelo Goodman made the following observation in 1916:

> Afrikaners must have a higher regard for the traditional architecture of their country that answers so excellently to the constraints of the climate. Let us preserve the old. Are the historic thatched roofs, that regrettably, we are increasingly seeing less and less of, not much more attractive than these new-fangled roofs of corrugated iron? This voice of warning is indeed necessary. We are only all too inclined towards frivolously abandoning the beautiful in favour of the practical. The personal is disappearing from our immediate surrounds. In our homes we are using furniture and all sorts of articles that the factories churn out and deposit on our doorsteps, a thousand a day. And at the cheapest rate, we burden ourselves with them, instead of being contented with fewer pieces, but which carry the stamp of a producer inspired by a love of their craft. (36)

Appearing in *De Huisgenoot*, the article formed part of a weekly series focusing on local artists, which had as its aim the furthering (or indeed the establishing) of a truly 'indigenous' South African artistic tradition. As considered in Chapter Three, with reference to the *völkich* ideas dominant at the time, one of the highest cultural ideals posed to a nation, or '*volk*', was the ability to articulate itself through art which was to serve as an expression of its own unique character.

Importantly, *völkich* relied primarily on the notion of a *volk* as "rooted in a particular soil, ground or place" (Zimmerman 8). The Cape Dutch architecture mentioned here is often referred to as South Africa's only indigenous form of architecture, based exactly on the claim that it 'answers so excellently to the constraints of the climate.' Goodman's call to 'preserve the old' is thus intricately coupled, not only with the sentiment to preserve earlier forms, but also the 'unique character of the v*olk*', or their unique history. The interest in the preservation of the authentic therefore becomes entwined here with the preservation of the 'authentic character' of the *volk*. In the second place "the thatched roofs of old" thus indeed serve as such "remnants from the past" which could be

preserved and imbued with associations in order to signify a truly local architectural history, keeping Hall and Bombardella's observation in mind that modern nostalgia is "inevitably drawn to heritage – material remnants from the past which can be [saturated with] new interpretations" (1).

Importantly, the expression of these *völkich* assumptions fed a Romantic notion of nationalism. Within this paradigm, the privileging of craft prevailed, as it entailed the 'expression of the unique character of the nation' by means of practices rooted in a history of 'traditional forms'. In this regard Goodman also expressed the following sentiments regarding folk art:

> Our modern furniture has so little character – it lacks the personal, the truly beautiful, that one finds, for example, in the furniture that we often disregard, that comes from the hands of virtually unknown Afrikaans artisans. The sturdy, elegant 'boer'-furniture stands testimony to the powerful artistic feel alive within our *volk,* and which is only awaiting full development. (39)

Shunning factory produced-furniture, Goodman encourages his readers to put "folk art in their homes", since not only is it much cheaper than factory-furniture, but also carries "the stamp of an producer inspired by a love of their craft", which he idealized as the forge in which character is shaped, as well as being indicative of a highly developed moral sense (39). As with the many movements which expressed the idealization of craft and the fetishization of the hand-made, as exemplified by the *Art Noveau* movement at the end of the nineteenth century, these were deeply rooted in an idealistic conception of labour. The 'personal touch' of the artisan was set in stark contrast to the depersonalization of modernization, exemplified in industrially produced goods. Importantly, more than just being rooted in a Romantic suspicion of industrialization, these were deeply embedded in a discourse of 'improvement' – the utopian sentiment that handmade goods would 'return' people to more authentic ways of life by restoring the original relationship between the individual and their labour, as well as that between individual and community, abolished under industrialization and urbanization. In Goodman's thinking, however, the utopian impulse underlying this idealization of labour

– on which many of these 'arts and crafts' movements of the late nineteenth century relied – was being coupled with very specific nationalistic sentiments.

His idealization of folk art is therefore inseparable from his conception of the concomitant 'ennobling' effects of labour, as far as character is concerned – especially in terms of the character of the '*volk*'. At the same time, furthering folk art was also an attempt at furthering a form of art that is quintessential to South Africa which, just like the thatched roofs, could serve as 'remnants from the past' – as proof that South Africa did indeed preside over a historic tradition of folk art which could serve as the foundation for this truly South African school of art.

In the final instance, therefore, this valorization of folk art also served as an attempt to elevate poor whites. As in the case of the clothes of the Voortrekkers mentioned earlier, the notion of folk art was utilized as 'evidence' of a local art tradition, and thus of the level of cultural – and spiritual – development of the nation. After expressing his praise of traditional furniture and architecture, Goodman proceeds to make the public aware of the value of authentic 'boer' furniture, encouraging them to invest in these authentic pieces as a duty to their motherland – since every nation should be encouraged to forge their own forms of artistic expression, as proof of their own unique 'soul' (38-39). Here it was also applied in an attempt to address the 'poor white' question – i.e. to generate employment for poor whites, as well as cast them into a more favourable, or indeed romantic light, as 'artisans' 'misunderstood' by a community who have become corrupted by the promises of industrialization (as opposed, of course, to the reality that many of them had to create their own furniture out of necessity, either out of poverty, or out of the lack of availability of industrially produced goods). As stated earlier, insofar as an 'authentic past' does not refer to an empirically verifiable reality, it functions as an unstable signifier. This is demonstrated in the above illustration of the manner in which the preservation of the 'authentic' becomes coupled with ideas of 'preserving the authentic character of the *volk*,' and thus also with ideas about racial purity.

Comprising a rather obscure example, perhaps, this extract in fact embodies many of the characteristics of the discourse on authenticity prevalent at the time, and which still have relevance today. In this regard, I would like to cite the following example which, like the *kapstok* discussed in Chapter Three,[35] exemplifies kitsch produced around these contradictory ideas of authenticity quite powerfully. In his 2003 inventory of the most horrific items of South African bad taste, *Cringe the Beloved Country*, cultural journalist Pat Hopkins[36] lists "the printer's tray with filled with a collection of fiddly ornaments" as second only to the painted ostrich egg and the *delicious monster* in exemplifying kitsch in the home (16-17). Whereas the former might have had its roots in the utilization of a very real antique, its imminent popularity led to various copies being sold widely, copies which, like the yoke, bear no markings of the ravages of time. No ink stains or dents stand testimony to its years of service in a printer's shop before retiring to the living room wall. And as if the latter is not sufficient substantiation of its kitsch status, its newly assigned function as the refuge of all kinds of knick-knacks and cute ornaments stands testimony to its kitschness [Fig. 4.3].

Figure 4.3 The printer's tray

Kitsch is therefore often the result not only of the wish-fulfilling impulse at the heart of the wistful longing to return to an authentic past, but also of the contradictions which arise from attempts to preserve the authentic.

[35] See Fig. 3.26

[36] Although Hopkins provides a vast collection of examples of South Afircan kitsch, these are not considered from a theoretical perspective. In this regard, this thesis is new in that its attempt to contribute to providing a theoretical reading of these.

To continue with the investigation of this concern with 'authenticity', more than half century later the South African photographer David Goldblatt would comment on small towns losing their character in the face of industrialization. In the preface to a collection of pictures taken in the town of Boksburg, he comments that "[p]hotographs from numerous other towns of comparable size would not, I think, have been very different from these, taken in Boksburg" (1). He continues:

> This proclivity of our towns and their people to become more and more alike is something I have noticed in many parts of South Africa, though some seem more resistant to change than others. It starts when the big banks, building societies, chain stores, hypermarkets, property developers and so on move into town. They soon dominate the place, absorbing, displacing and destroying much of what is idiosyncratic, perhaps unpolished, but essentially individual and local about the town's business life and architectural style. They replace it with their national and highly sophisticated way of doing business.
>
> When Barclays, Volkskas, Standard, Checkers, OK, Edgars, Fochini's, Truworths, Wimpy, Kentucky and so on, have taken over the prime sites in town, put up their standard styles of building or fascias, their uniform signs, colours et cetera, then one town centre comes to look pretty much like another. When the new housing developments that are spreading with such voracity across the veld are promoted by large groups with minor variations on a few stock plans, the suburbs that result are predictably similar. (1)

Rather than a call for the preservation of earlier styles, this extract communicates something of the alienation felt in the face of what seems to be the unstoppable force of modernization. The notion of towns and suburbs as becoming increasingly uniform is by no means unique to a South African landscape. Indeed, the "[p]roliferation of huge impersonal cities and the predominance of the anonymous style of urban life" is part of the world-wide experience of modern societies in which increased urbanization goes hand in hand with growing industrialization (Sontag 294). Not only is it the driving force behind the former, but also the underlying condition of production which gives rise to "standard styles… uniform signs, colours" and similar housing developments. Indeed, the

serialization described above is reminiscent of Baudrillard's simulacrum: the leveling of all appearances until one town becomes like another.

It can be argued that it is to this leveling effect of the era of mass production – one that reduces things to an "abstract sameness" – that kitsch owes its existence, and exists, indeed, as one of its effects (Calinescu 228). As far as homes are concerned, this is evident in terms of the standardization and the use of similar materials and styles; expressing the mediocre, uniform tastes of the middle-class – producing a line of homes that 'compete with the Jones's' who are always next door (in the sense that they seem to live next to the next door neighbours too, the equivalent of a hall of mirrors in which the Jones's are endlessly refracted and seem to embody 'the house next door' *ad infinitum*, so as to produce an endless row of similarly styled suburban homes).

On the other hand, kitsch is also the result of "a desperate compulsion to escape the abstract sameness of things" – to escape the anxiety produced by such a vision of an endless suburban sprawl – by providing "illusionary images of uniqueness" which offer "a kind of self-made promise and futile *promisse du bonheur*" (Adorno, qtd. in Calinescu 228). The era of mass production both generates kitsch as such, as well as the drive to escape from the uniformity it engenders. Accordingly, kitsch serves the dual purposes of both conformism and escapism (which leads one back to conformism, since the escape it offers is not in any sense a real one, but a temporary diversion).

Kitsch's contradictory handling of the 'authentic' thus also has its legacy in generations of escapism.[37] As put by Gillian, "[k]itsch is the world as we would like it to be; not as it is… kitsch is the flight from the present… an enchanted grotto" (9). She therefore draws

[37] As put by Giesz, the longing to escape "constitutes an integral part of human existence" (162). He notes, however, a specific modern mutation – which more or less coincides with, and is exemplified by the rise of modern tourism in the nineteenth century. This entails "a specific use of leisure", that typically "consists of spending one's holidays abroad, mostly with large numbers of people like oneself" (160). Tourism is therefore the very opposite of actual adventure or exploration, as it "levels out and collectivizes the psychological state of travelers" (161) As observed in *The Kitschman as Tourist*, to Giesz this dual impulse of adventure and reassurance is contained within the basic tourist package, which provides one with a list of experiences, thrills, and ambiances, yet while safely concealed from any real threat or experience of the unfamiliar (161).

a direct line from kitsch to the escapism of the aristocracy since the Baroque, rooted in attempts to return to simpler, earlier, or more natural forms of life. For example, Gillian cites the medieval-themed castle of the Wagner-obsessed, "mad" King Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-86), who lived out his desire to escape from reality in what could probably have been described as the precursor of the modern "theme-park" (10). One could also include the fantasies of Marie Antoinette, who indulged in having herself painted while dressed-up as a German shepherd-girl (11). Her luxurious lifestyle decried such rural pretence, and her status as mistress of the king belied this symbol of virginity she enjoyed assuming. This affinity for the 'natural' also lay at the heart of the "garden follies of the seventeenth century", in which the creation of elaborate gardens by the rich and upper classes provided a "prelapsarian paradise" for the playing out of their escapist fantasies (17). To this end, "the fashion among landowners of the day was to build a rustic woodland hermitage and install a ragged, bearded recluse to give flesh to the fantasy" on their estates (18).

"Pretense," Gillian concludes, "of one sort or another is one of the cornerstones of kitsch" (20). In addition to the rural pretenses of the upper class, one also needs to take into account the way in which their freedom to live out their fantasies, as well as their legitimacy to do so, was emulated by the rising middle-class. For example, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the mansions of the new French and British aristocracy displayed the same finishing touches as those on Greek temples, in order to signal their legitimacy as a ruling class by reference to the great civilizations of antiquity, as well as in their emulation of the artistic tastes of the cultural elite (20). In the twentieth century, the escapism of the aristocracy has been increasingly emulated by Hollywood since the 1930s, in the "excesses of movie-stardom – such as the villas, swimming pools, gold dolphin taps of the alluring, make-believe Disneyworld of Tinsel Town" (21).[38] Also, especially under the rapid urbanization during the earlier half of the twentieth century, the nostalgia for 'lost rural idylls' flourished. In addition, the need for fun and

[38]Also see Calinescu, who notes that "along with the humbler varieties of kitsch", we have to recognize the existence "of a gorgeous kitsch, which is the privilege of the rich" (243). It is perhaps useful to dwell on this point, as it undercuts the assumption that kitsch is necessarily limited to groups with a lower income, who can only afford imitations of the luxuries they desire and confirms kitsch as having a pervasive existence.

escape after WWII was reflected in the credit-card American dream, the bright Technicolor world of entertainment for sale, in the form of the juke-box and the drive-in (21). During this time, exoticism also flourished as evidenced by the popularity of 'Tiki' – especially in the form of the Tiki Bar.[39]

This background considered, as should be evident by now, kitsch rooted in modern nostalgia is not so much intent on supplying a 'wistful return' to the past as it is offering an escape from the present – "an illusionary escape from the banality and meaninglessness of contemporary day-to-day life" (Calinescu 251). I proceed from these more general considerations, to stand still at a consideration of the 'garden follies,' or indeed the 'nature follies,' which have proliferated in the South African gardens and interiors of the past fifty years.

In the first place, turning to the ubiquitous presence of the three wall-bound ducks [Fig. 4.4], these can be explained in that they evoke a sense of the 'rural idylls of the country', lusted after by the urbanized city dweller. Considering this world-wide trend – harking back to the lakes of Europe and the privilege of hunting conferred on the gentry by their particular form of landownership (idealized here) – it is useful to recall Dorfles' maxim that kitsch always involves a series of

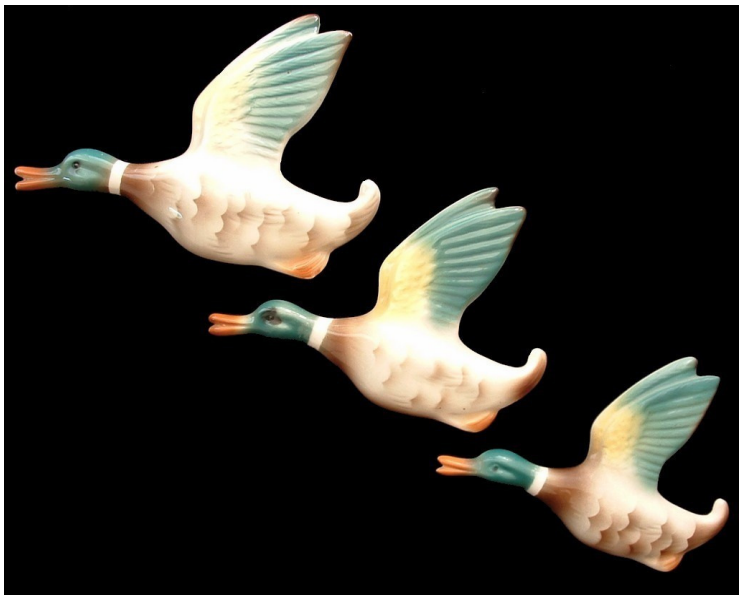


Figure 4.4 Lusting after rural idylls – three ducks on a wall

[39]"Tiki" originally referred to a deity in the art and mythology of the South Pacific. But more generally, during the twentieth century, it became a term that referred to a style which incorporated a range of images and elements that depicted the exotic lifestyles of islanders the world over, in an amalgam of styles from the South Pacific, Polynesia, Hawaii and the Caribbean, "based on the exotic visions of island culture borrowed from tales told by American soldiers stationed in the South Pacific during World War II" (Kirsten, par. 1).

inaccurately transplanted signifiers. Therefore, when inserted into the longing for a lost rural ideal particular to the South African landscape, such as described earlier, this illustrates Hall and Bombardella's assertion that nostalgia promiscuously attaches itself to loosely circulating signifiers which it re-imbues with associations so as to satisfy its sense of longing in any direct or indirect manner – as evinced by this three part flock that adorned the walls of so many South African homes.

The same can be said for the Mexican dozing off lazily against the wall, in which a supposedly lost ethnic world is idealised away from the intrusion of modern time, where one can still sit back and relax in the sun. This is opposed to the rat race in which the dweller of the suburban home participates, as their 9-5 lifestyle structures their interaction with the Mexican – placed next to the garage or the front door – which they see when they depart in the morning and return in the afternoon [Fig 4.5].

Figure 4.5 Another form of generalized nostalgia

Consider, also, the following series of contrasting photographs. In the first group, the Baroque finishing on these South African structures – dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth century – signal notions of artistic taste and refinement, associated with the

Figure 4.6a-c) Baroque Originals

old world charm of the rural gentry of the former Cape Colony [Fig 4.6]. These references in turn indicates a connection with a European ancestry, and the legacy of a European decorative tradition, harkening back to a European past and the refined artistic traditions associated with it. The second set of photographs with which it is contrasted – the cement pond, the water fountain and the cement statuette – signal a more general connotation with an opulent past and decorated gardens of the aristocracy – of which these features are imitations, created in pre-cast moulds and sold en-mass [Fig 4.7].

Figure 4.7a-b) Cement Copies

Last but not least, a discussion of "nature follies" also has to include a consideration of the garden gnome, who beyond any dispute occupies a place of honour in the *kitschmensch*'s garden [Fig. 4.8]. As indeed observed by Hopkins "home is where the gnome is" (16). In the light of the mentioned discussion on escapism, this 'magical' or 'fairy tale' creature clearly speaks to the need to escape into fantasy. More generally, though, gnomes – like fairies and elves – are nature sprites, which are to be read as personifications of nature. In the context of the disenchantment of nature which modern industrialism entails, the garden gnome involves the recreation of the 'enchanted woods,' confined to the small square of the city-dweller's garden patch. Furthermore, the version of nature that is recreated here is an idealization of nature. This is demonstrated by the realm which the gnome inhabits: the garden. The garden gnome is thus literally the personification of nature made small, the enchanting and mysterious, chaotic realm of nature domesticated, like the gnome, who dwells in the cultivated realm of the garden.

Figure 4.8 The Garden Gnome

The abovementioned connects with Gregotti's observation that "to live in a place according to kitsch rules implies a constant effort to diminish its scale" (270). When this comes to bear on the "functional activities of… great cities", it involves "a constant search for ways to reduce [these] to domestic terms" (270). Take for example the "house beautiful… the small family home on the outskirts of a large… city, with its garden, flowers and net curtains" (270). If this indeed represents "the dream of every middle-class citizen", however, then "a hundred thousand examples of the 'house beautiful' set

cheek by jowl necessarily transcend the private sector", and "to the allure of the kitsch status symbol – a new, if ugly, dimension is added" (272).

To return to the tension set up between the desire for escape and the conformism of kitsch, the 'house beautiful' is the very symbol of the aesthetic and sociological limits of kitsch. At the same time as it presents itself as unique – an escape from the alienation of the urban environment, one that still embodies the ideals of 'country living' – it has to disguise its mass-scale (the suburbs), the fact that everyone is enjoying the same dream, which thus renders the dream itself full of holes. As Gregotti maintains, "[t]o survive, kitsch must operate on a small individual scale" by achieving the balance "between domesticity and the sense of adventure, the element of surprise and firm reassurance" (272).

The above-mentioned illustrates the 'double working' of kitsch, as this tension between conformity and escapism is incorporated into the very structure of kitsch in order for it to survive. This is perhaps a good point to focus on in terms of constructing a definition for kitsch: it operates by incorporating the longing for the authentic within the generation of the inauthentic.

The invention of the 'primitive'

Another important point to consider is that this modern fetishization of the authentic often draws on the notion of primitivism. As stated by Phillips and Steiner, the longing for an idealized state of 'authenticity' was often projected onto non-Western peoples all over the world (5). This of course refers to the notion of the supposed 'noble savage' as 'unpretentious', 'spontaneous', free from the ills of modernization, and above all, 'authentic'. Importantly, this notion of 'primitivism' is also present in interior decoration of the modern home. A guide from the era in question recommended decorating the home with natural materials on the following grounds:

> [i]f we would return to a more healthy condition, we must even be as little children or as savages; we must get rid of the acquired and artificial, and return to and develop normal instincts. (qtd. in Phillips and Steiner 17)

The use of ethnic arts is also suggested, as it "work[s] best in modern interiors, where crudeness and sophistication can act as a foil to each other" (17). Importantly, the way in which this is done is often in terms of using materials that are in fact 'fake' to create a sense of authenticity. As suggested by the 1960's guide *Better Homes and Gardens*, which gives suggestions to create a "casual modern look", homeowners are encouraged to contrast sleek modern interiors with introducing a sense of "nature":

> Natural materials or copies of them are in vogue. Grass cloth, or paper printed to look like it; rough brick, or three-dimensional plastic brick wall covering; wooden floors, or wood-grained vinyl; wood paneling that comes pre-finished, or wallpaper that resembles it; hand-woven fabrics, or materials that simulates these textures… all these are marks of distinguished Contemporary decorating (5).

Ironically, however, the 'authentic' is supposedly signaled through the use of the 'fake', the natural evoked through imitation pieces. Is this not what was at work also in the so-called 'hippy chic' and the fetish for 'Tikki' of the 60s and 70s? This is also the case in the 'primitivist fantasy' of the stone-age themed bedroom in the extreme example of Fig. 4.9. As Phillips and Steiner explain, used in the manner described here, the "return to the natural is viewed more as a frivolous or contrastive enhancement to the modern than as an outright rejection of the fundamental triumph of industry and capitalism" (18).

Figure 4.9 "Primitivist fantasies"

To return to the recommendations of *Better Homes and* Gardens, it is claimed that this 'natural look' can be further enhanced with "accented

pieces that have a hand-crafted look… [such as] peasant art imported from other countries" (5). What is problematic about this suggestion, however, is that it reduces 'peasant art' to a uniform category in which all difference is leveled, relegating peoples from non-Western countries to the all-containing category of the 'primitive' – as existing outside time, etc. to serve as foil for the 'up-to-dateness' of the interior of the modern home. Accordingly, "ethnic worlds are thought to share attributes that bond them together in a 'fraternity of otherness' while remaining uniformly foreign, and sometimes wondrous to those who inhabit the West" (Phillips and Steiner 18). Ethnic arts are used in this context of the home, only insofar as these "evoke the barbarity of untamed nature without encroaching too deeply on the creature comforts of modernity" (18).

Considering such a handling of 'ethnic arts' more closely, it is also worth considering how this mirrors the contradictory place awarded to ethnic others within the discourse of modernity. The 'civilizing mission' had the desired outcome of the assimilation and integration of non-Western others into modernity as its legitimating rationale. Importantly, this was measured by their consumption and production of Western goods. These attempts to integrate within modernization, which on the one hand is held up as the ideal for all colonized peoples, was on the other hand also derided as an instance of their loss of 'authentic tribal identity', especially as far as their arts were concerned. If the latter expressed any sign of modernization, these were de-valued, as it disturbed the 'authenticity paradigm' that art from non-Western others were subjected to (Cohodas 146).

The same notions of authenticity that functioned as criteria for considering ethnic art were also at work in the contradictory logic of the separate development advocated by the apartheid state. On the one hand, apartheid endeavoured to keep black people locked in a primitive state, exploiting their labour and thereby denying them entry into modernity. Yet, at the same time this is used as grounds to prove their 'stupidity', 'laziness', or their unassimilatability into Western culture.

Insofar as kitsch in the home includes this undercurrent of 'primitivism', it aims to familiarize and domesticate these 'exotic' elements. This is an important characteristic of kitsch. As Calinescu observes:

> What gives kitsch some kind of stylistic unity in the long run is probably the compatibility of its heterogeneous elements with a certain notion of 'hominess'. Kitsch is very often the kind of 'art' that the average consumer might desire to own and display in his home. Even when displayed elsewhere – waiting rooms, restaurants, etc. – kitsch is meant to suggest some sort of 'artistic' intimacy, and atmosphere saturated with 'beauty,' that kind of beauty one would wish to see one's daily life surrounded with. (250)

According to him, an important feature of kitsch is that it aims, above all, at making the owner of the house comfortable in their own home (250). Giesz, too, speaks of kitsch as "a self-indulgent desire for privacy; feelings of tenderness towards one's home and family; an attempt to make every experience seem familiar by transforming it into something cosy and snug" (160).

For Freud, however, this notion of "hominess", or what he refers to as the *Heimlich* had an additional set of meanings. Freud defines *Heimlich* as "meaning 'familiar,' 'native,' 'belonging to the home'" (qtd. in Godwin 94). Yet, according to him, "the house not only protects but conceals" (94). The meaning of the *Heimlich* can therefore also be cited as *Geheimnis* – which refers to "that which good manners oblige us to conceal" (94) And what it must conceal is the *unheimlich* – the name for everything that ought to have remain hidden and secret, yet has become visible. Goodwin therefore maintains that the home, "that centre of *Heimlichkeit*, is also the centre of the *Unheimlich*, all that must be concealed or repressed" (94).

The home as the centre of the familiar is therefore premised on keeping the *unheimlic*h out. Kitsch in the home is thus premised on keeping the *unheimlich* concealed, but it is exactly in these attempts that the *unheimlich* becomes most visible. As described so far in the course of this thesis, it is exactly in its attempts to conceal these so-called '*unheimlich*' parts of modernity that kitsch can be said to become the site where these

contradictions of modernity loom large – where all that it tries to conceal indeed becomes visible.

Suburban bliss

Considering the contradictory place assigned to others, with the West located as the centre of modernity and others at its peripheries, I will now examine how this paradox operates by turning more explicitly to the white suburban home during apartheid. Firstly, I will focus on the notion of uniformity to demonstrate how this 'abstract sameness' of kitsch and its apparent 'fixity of stereotypes' was not only limited to the expression of middle-class values, but also underlined the fixity with which whiteness was insulated against the supposed 'black threat'.

Considering the alleged uniformity of kitsch, the most obvious characteristic of the examples mentioned so far, and those to follow, is their ubiquity – the fact that so many houses were indeed characterized by these ostensibly 'kitsch features.' As described by Hopkins:

> In the 1970's and 1980's, man's home was his moorish castle. In the garden were pot-plant laden clay donkey carts and a wooden bridge over an imaginary stream. On the lawn, watered from the borehole and trimmed with a Flymo mower, were water-filled plastic Coca-Cola bottles to keep the Maltese poodle… from crapping on the grass. And supposedly supervising the 'garden boy' was a ceramic Mexican nodding off under his sombrero on the wall next to the front door…
>
> Beyond this was the entrance hall, its floors tiled with highly polished slasto, and walls with cork that rose to the rope cornices. In a corner, above the snow-white Flocatti rug, hung a macramé filled with pink satin flowers… [In the adjoining sitting room] was the matching Gomma Gomma lounge suite, arranged round a chrome-and-glass coffee table, on top of which was a dried flower arrangement in a copper bowl. A matching springbok leapt onto the wall between a printer's tray filled with fiddly ornaments and a pastel print of a tearful child. The dining area was more cheerful. A 'Bless This House' mirror looked

> down on the lace doily-bedecked imbuia table surrounded by *riempie* chairs... [surrounded by potted plants, that] reached through the Spanish burglar bars to the freedom of the garden. (16)

Although admittedly exaggerated for the sake of comical effect, I am interested in the fact that this description paints such a recognizable picture. Not only is this little cameo rendered by Hopkins utterly amusing, but it was indeed echoed in many interiors of the era, during which these ostensibly kitsch features flourished in countless homes. In fact, it can be argued that this description is amusing only insofar as it evokes these highly recognizable images.

As discussed earlier with reference to garden follies, the "wooden bridge over an imaginary stream" is kitsch, since this attempt to insinuate the presence of a 'country brook' only creates the illusion of the open space of the country in the small scale of the city [Fig. 4.10]. On the other hand, the wooden bridge features centrally in Japanese Zen gardens, as symbol of transformation, symbolizing the crossing over from one phase into another. Yet, in the suburban garden in question it serves only as an exotic reference. So does the donkey, which points to an earlier, more rural type of existence, which is in stark contrast with the suburban garden, where it is illegal to keep these kinds of animals to begin with. Moreover, the donkey is a characteristically Latin American reference – like the ceramic Mexican it signifies a culture that is idealized as being outside the constraints of time [Fig. 4.11]. Also, remembering Goodman's diatribe on local furniture, "the

Figure 4.10 and 4.11 The evergreen wooden bridge and donkey

imbuia table surrounded by *riempie* chairs" does not fare much better. Like the (ubiquitous) printer's tray, they are all hardly antiques, but are reproduced on demand. Importantly, when considering most of the objects mentioned in this ensemble, the point is that they are kitsch, above all, because they are so conventional. They are mass-produced and signal conventional tastes.

Consider, for example, the way in which many of the elements mentioned by Hopkins are echoed in this photograph of a town council representative and his wife taken in their home [Fig 4.12].[40] A rope cornice dangles from the roof against cork walls that are not real. The use of 'natural materials' is evoked through the stretch of stone wall next to a section of wood paneling. A doily is draped over a small table to the left of the woman in the picture, and a portrait of a young bride smiles over the fire-place (perhaps idealizing the wife in her youth, as the blushing bride and domestic goddess of the hearth and home). A figurine is encased in a niche in the wall – a copy of a classical sculpture no doubt – time stands still in the glass globe on the mantle-piece. 'Crystal' chandeliers dangle from the centre of the ceiling, as well

Figure 4.12 The interior of a council man's home

[40]Although I am aware that this photograph by Goldblatt is by no means kitsch in itself, its focus on the lives and homes of ordinary people illustrate many of the aspects relevant to this chapter. And although this was not necessarily the goal of the photographer, the fact that these elements formed such an inherent part of the typical Afrikaner home during the apartheid years, illustrates the case in point. Therefore, with mention earlier of attempting to 'catch the evidence' of something as fugitive as a sensibility, Hopkins' description, too, becomes a snapshot like the one above, which gives us 'evidence' of the 'existence of the 'ghost'.

as both of the adjoining walls, underlining the crowded feeling of the room, as opposed to the open dining halls and high ceilings of the rich during previous centuries, to which it alludes.

If one considers the fixity with which kitsch packages cultural sensibilities and hands them down, the ubiquity of these elements should come as no surprise. As put by Rugg, "[t]he appeal of kitsch resides in its formula, its familiarity, and its validation of shared sensibilities" (par. 5). As such,

> [k]itsch does not analyze culture but repackages and stylizes it. Kitsch reinforces established conventions, appealing to mass tastes and gratifying communal experiences. Kitsch comes to support our basic sentiments and beliefs, not disturb or question them… As a result, kitsch is easy to market and effortless to consume (par. 9).

The claim that kitsch had a wide-spread appeal during the 1950s and 60s does not need much more elaboration. Like in Hopkins' description of the "moorish castle", this characteristic uniformity finds particularly apt description in Anton Goosen's 1989 song, *Boy vannie suburbs* (Boy from the suburbs). The song succeeds in linking the proliferation of these ostensibly kitsch elements with a certain collection of values held by their users, thus introducing the ethical dimension Calinescu holds as necessary for an in depth analysis of kitsch (228).

Described by Breytenbach as the "first true folk singer" of Afrikaans (i), as opposed to the invented 'folk songs' of the volkspele referred to in Chapter Three, Goosen is credited with a more 'authentic' rendition of the Afrikaans life-world. Yet, in this particular song, what is 'quintessential' about the Afrikaners seems to be their kitschness. Goosen is therefore to be included in the wider tradition of folk and blues, such as that embraced by Bob Dylan, which drew strongly on a tradition of social commentary:[41]

[41]The fact that this song involves social commentary signals a more self-aware approach to kitsch. This will of course be explored more specifically in Chapter Five. Although Goosen can indeed be regarded as one of the pre-cursers to the *Voëlvry* tour that is treated in more detail in Chapter Five, as concerns the choice of this song in this chapter, I am more interested in the life-world he renders, than necessarily in the

he listens to elvis and the heartsore sunshine sisters
sussie plays along, on the hawaiian guitar
gnome at the front-gate and a fish tank in the living room
a sticky strip next to the screen door, that lets the insects *vrek* (die)
…
three ducks in a row next to the brechikoff-painting
"what is a home without a mother" he asks
each house has its cross, with a beer in the right-hand fist
he knows about life, and he is quite worldly-wise[42]

"*Boy vannie suburbs*" describes a generic type – just like a description of the interior of his home can refer to any suburban South African home. The lines quoted above contain references to the 'common denominators' as far as the interiors of many South African homes are concerned: the "gnome at the front-gate" and the "fish tank in the living room", as well as the "three ducks in a row" and a Tretchikoff painting. These elements generate a highly recognizable ensemble, similar to the description by Hopkins, which derives its effectiveness from the fact that it indeed refers to an easily recognizable type.

These images evoke not only shared tastes but also shared values, specifically with regard to gender stereotypes. "'[W]hat is a home without a mother?' he asks" – referring to the conventional wisdom expressed in a number of adages that were immortalized in South African homes in a number of forms, such as the framed poster, the fridge magnet, the mirror or the key-rack. The most conventional of which was those bearing the words "What is a home without a mother". This particular sentiment is portrayed, however, as being quite shallow. The idealised notions of femininity expressed in the statement, "what is a home without a mother" (positioning the woman as the homemaker, indeed the central pivot of domestic life) are contrasted in the next line with the equally popular adage "each house has its cross", literally meaning that each home (or family as such) has its own problems. The fact that he says this with a "beer in his right fist", however, allows for the following reading. The image of a man with beer, which, importantly, is

commentary he provides. In the song, kitsch in an everyday white South African environment during the apartheid years is highlighted.
[42]My translation (Goosen 3).

not in his hand but in his "fist", signals a culture of 'drink and *donner*' – i.e. getting drunk and beating up your woman. This is indeed portrayed as acceptable or part of life (since, after all, every home has its cross). Moreover, the notion that each house has its "cross" has additional connotations, such as that of 'a cross to bear', suggesting that marital problems – or indeed the sexist culture of Afrikaner patriarchy, which endorses the type of masculinity evoked in the lyrics at hand – has to be stoically endured as an unavoidable part of life.

The statements "he knows all about life", and "indeed he is quite worldly-wise" are ironically intended, deriding the supposed 'conventional wisdom' expressed by these adages. Firstly, being worldly-wise could refer to being streetwise – knowing what is 'in' and what is 'out' – reflected in the kitsch decoration of his home. This is of course not real 'wisdom', since it does not go as far as to realize itself as nothing more than just the expression of conventional tastes. Secondly, the term "worldly-wise" also refers to being sophisticated, which is obviously being derided, as *Boy vannie suburbs* epitomizes all that is crass:

> over a branch in the street hangs his car-engine Sunday late
> *sussie* helps him too in her crimplene mini-dress
> on the dashboard is a patch of grass and a big fin at the back
> G T W Z tuned up for some Sunday fun

Boy vannie suburbs embraces a kitsch version of masculinity, which relies on the display of a series of kitsch symbols, such as the practice of 'dressing up' his car described above. His engine hangs in the street, where he works on it in a display of his masculinity, like the grass on the dashboard and the spoiler at the back, neither of which has a functional value (such as making the car go faster, in the case of the spoiler), but are merely placed there for decoration (only suggesting the idea of speed). Taking the car out for some "Sunday fun" not only refers to the practice of taking a Sunday drive to go out and see a bit of the world, but also provides the oppertunity for the world to see him and his 'babe' in their dressed up car.

Lastly, *sussie* (the woman in the song, referred to by this generic name for an Afrikaans girl, literally translated as "sister" – but also referring to an Afrikaans girl in general) is part of the pimping of the car. In this she merely partakes, helping *Boy vannie suburbs* through offering herself up as a symbol for display. Dressed in a mini, she is a sex object, the female admirer who validates his masculinity by observing his work on the engine. Also, she is part of the display, those who see his car see her too, as one of the 'ornaments'. That the mini is made from crimplene, referring to the common fashions of the day, relies on kitsch styles to suggest desirability.

The images created in Goosen's song – as well as the open arms with which many of these objects or elements were embraced by society – signals something of what Rugg refers to as "[t]he self-congratulatory spirit of kitsch" (par. 6). He suggests that it is also therein that the deception of kitsch lies:

> Kitsch holds up a highly considerate mirror…that allows contemporary man to recognize himself in the counterfeit image it throws back at him and to confess his own lies (with a delight which is to a certain extent sincere). By providing comfort, kitsch performs a denial. It glosses over harsh truths and anesthetizes genuine pain…. There is no counterconcept to kitsch. Its antagonist is not an idea but reality. (par. 6)

In this sense, the "cozy mediocrity of the suburbs" (Du Preez 6) offers a refuge and a denial from actual realities. And within a South African context, this above all includes the actual reality of race. To return to Foster, an Afrikaner mythology which premised itself largely on a specific type of relationship to the land "was underwritten by the urgency of the question of how (and where) to place Africans in the landscape" (255), as this was a landscape which, "in the final analysis, needed to be empty" (256). With this in mind, the banishing of racial others is indeed the condition of possibility for the very existence of the white suburb. When concerned, therefore, with the manner in which the kitsch features of (and in) white South African homes underline already accepted stereotypes, these do not only refer to the expression of middle-class values, but since these shared sensibilities also include fixed conceptions of race, it furthermore serve to deeply entrench notions of whiteness. This is also observed by Goldblatt in his

exploration of "the life and values of the middle-class, white urban society" (i). In the repetition and similarity of certain features, he read "a deep and portentous fixity of self-elected, legislated whiteness" literally written into "the tight circumscription of its pre-cast concrete walls" (ii). He observes this "fixity" as the most pervasive factor of the towns which he visited. Although most of the "townspeople pursue[d] the family, social and civic concerns of respectable burgers anywhere", these remain locked in "white dreams and white proprieties" (ii).

The idea of fixity is elaborated by Enwezor:

> An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural, historical, or racial difference in the discourse of colonialism is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and demonic repetition. Likewise, the stereotype which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated. (24)

That apartheid, as a discourse which relied on fixed notions of identity par excellence, was steeped in colonial discourse is a claim that needs no further elaboration. It depended on the fixity of racial stereotypes for its very survival, for which it relied on essentialized, fetishistic notions of identity. These identities were articulated in an unreflective and nostalgic way, which, above all, had to be anxiously repeated (24). The articulation of these therefore becomes quite 'susceptible' to kitsch, as it is relatively easy to establish a parallel with the fixing function of kitsch, as well as the tendency of kitsch towards anxious repetition – a feature which it shares with any type of discourse that depends on strategies of inclusion and exclusion, and privileging one section of reality over another while banishing the remainder.

Nowhere is the fixity of these stereotypes illustrated more clearly that in the countless objects that signal the expression of family values. The modern home, as also specifically being home to the nuclear family, is particularly susceptible to serving as a receptor for

kitsch that glorifies family values. As put by Dorfles, "every ambiguous, false, tearful, emotional exaggeration brings about that typically kitsch attitude which could be defined as 'sentimentality'. We should not be surprised, therefore, if the family is particularly liable to house such sentimental attitudes" (129). More than just the sentimentalisation of filial ties, however, kitsch – as it often comes to bear on the family – involves the glorification of domesticity. In the Afrikaner home, however, this also becomes coupled with very definite conceptions surrounding race.

Family values

Both McClintock (35) and Gaitskell (241) emphasize the role of evangelism and the mission station in the development of domestic ideology as a response to industrialization in the colonial context during the course of the nineteenth century. It had the nuclear family unit as its focus, and involved the inscription of gender roles of the "male breadwinner, dependent house-keeping wife [and] dependent, school-going children" (241). Moreover, this had the effect of separating the public from the private sphere, with men going out to face the world and women staying at home to take care of the children. Gaitskell explains that as home and workplace grew increasingly separate, women were gradually excluded from production. Domestic ideology, however provided married women with "new importance as the 'angel' in the ever more private and child-centered house" (241). The woman, as wife and mother, became "the pivot of the family and consequently, the guardian of all Christian (and domestic) virtues" (241).

McClintock agrees that the notion of the nuclear, modern family is not a fact of nature, but is born from the discourse of domesticity. Yet, the way in which it is positioned in ideology often obscures this fact (34). She therefore explains that "domesticity denotes both a space (a geographic and architectural alignment) and *a social relation to power*" (35). Although the so-called 'cult of domesticity' is often positioned as "involving a naturally occurring, universal space – ensconced within the innermost interiors of society, yet lying theoretically beyond the domain of political analysis' it is in fact deeply dependant on "processes of social metamorphosis and political subjection" (35).

The above-mentioned insight holds especially true when brought to bear on Afrikaner culture, in which the family played no small role. Along with the notion of land, the family was probably one of the largest animating ideological symbols of Afrikanerdom. In the territorial narrative of the Great Trek, the family served as a neutralizing element, as the presence of women and children deflected all military connotations from the project of the Voortrekkers. This enabled the latter to be recast, not as an expedition of "conquerors", but as ordinary people, who were merely seeking to establish a "better life for their families" (Moerdijk 23). Moreover, the family served as the key site for ensuring racial purity. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Voortrekker women were positioned as the guardians of the purity of the white race. As explained by Gerhard Moerdijk with regard to his choice of assigning a place of honour to the Voortrekker woman on the Voortrekker monument, he states that this choice was motivated by the fact that "it is thanks to the Voortrekker women that we can speak of a white race in South Africa today" (23). Obeying the indictment to Abraham to "go forth and be fruitful, and create offspring as many as the sand of the sea", he claims that this was the only way to ensure that "South Africa stays a *blankemansland* [white man's land]" (23). As the guardians of the white race, the Voortrekker women therefore ensured, above all, white male hegemony.

We return, therefore, to McClintock's mentioned formulation of the cult of domesticity as reliant on social and political processes, of which she contends that "gender is abiding, but not the only dimension" (35). In addition to the gender roles dictated by the discourse of domesticity, within the Afrikaner family, these were intricately coupled with notions of race. Referring back to the roles assigned to the members of the family, as outlined by Gaitskell, the following additional dimensions are added – as is emphasized by the kitsch intended for the Afrikaner home.

Within the Afrikaner family, the father was at the head of the family, literally the up-keeper of white patriarchal rule. Consider the figure of the family tree [Fig 4.13]. Placed on the front pages of the family bible or on the living room wall (as in this example), the family tree lists the genealogy of the family through the drawing out of the family

bloodline. As observed by McClintock, "[p]anic about blood contiguity, ambiguity and *metissage* expressed intense anxieties about the fallibility of the white male and imperial potency" (47). Placing the patriarchal male at the centre of the family tree, his task in carrying over the family name ensures his (as well as white patriarchy's) superiority. By flaunting the family's 'pedigree,' the family tree is moreover steeped in the blood cult which fetishized the Afrikaners as the descendents of the Voortrekkers. (It is useful here to recall the fixation on filial relations expressed in the practice of selecting the progeny of Voortrekker and Boer War military heroes for the laying of cornerstones and unveiling of monuments). In short, the family tree expresses anxieties about racial purity through revealing anxieties pertaining to the family's lineage.

Figure 4.13 The Family Tree

It was in the face of this threat of contagion that the woman's role took shape as "*Vrou en Moeder*" ("Wife and Mother"). In addition to Gaitskell's 'preserver of the domestic realm', she is also positioned as the preserver of racial purity. As demonstrated so far,

> [b]ody boundaries were felt to be dangerously permeable and demanding continual purification, so that sexuality, in particular woman's sexuality, was cordoned off as the central transmitter of racial, and hence cultural contagion. Increasingly vigilant efforts to control women's bodies… were suffused with intense anxiety about the desecration of sexual boundaries and the consequences that racial contamination had for white male control of progeny, property and power. (47)

The mother thus served as the barrier to racial contamination and as the preserver of racial purity. Relegated to the domestic sphere, she was paradoxically both undervalued and idealized. The proliferation of objects bearing the words "*Wat is 'n huis sonder 'n moeder"* ("What is a home without a mother") [Fig 4.14] within Afrikaner homes expressed this idealization of the woman's role as homemaker and the "pivotal guardian of domestic virtues" (Gaitskell 241). In addition, she is also the guardian of the white race, as what is a white nation without a woman to bear its white children, as expressed in Moerdijk's sentiments.

This also becomes particularly clear when examining the role of children in the Afrikaner home. As explained by Gaitskell, the presence of children was pivotal in ensuring the woman's place in the home – in the role of child-rearer, "in the increasingly more private and child-centered house" [Fig. 4.15]. Children, however, also had to fulfill the important role of the "*nageslag*" – the progeny of the Afrikaners, and the preservers of the legacies of Afrikanerdom. The link between procreation and nation building was pertinent in ensuring the 'survival' of the 'white race in Africa'. As remarked by D.F. Malan in his inaugural speech of the

Figure 4.14 What, indeed…

Voortrekker Monument in 1949: “It is up to us and us alone if the Christendom still stands strong here at the Southern tip of Africa within the next 400 years” (Hopkins 35). Importantly, when considering the convergence between land and family, the survival of white supremacy went hand in hand with perpetuating white landownership.

Figure 4.15 Die nageslag

McClintock therefore describes the “power and importance of the family trope” as twofold:

> First, the family offered an indispensable figure for sanctioning the social hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests. Because the subordination of woman to man, and child to adult were deemed natural facts, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social *difference* as a category of nature. The family image came to figure *hierarchy within unity* as an organic element of historical progress, and thus indispensable for legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism. (McClintock 45)

In Afrikaner culture, however, the importance of the relation between microcosm and macrocosm is particularly highlighted, as the usual parallel of the family as the microcosm of the benevolent state – which looks after its citizens as a benevolent father after their children – becomes exaggerated. This becomes particularly clear when examining the relation between family and god. The typical white family home served as the site where the trinity of apartheid patriarchs – God, President, and Father; as the heads of the world, the *volk* and the family respectively – found their expression. Thus, within the family, notions of gender roles, religion, and politics are married, as the expression of family values also often contained the expression of these religious and political values.

Consider, for example, the presence of scrolls with little moral lessons in the Afrikaner home. The ubiquitous presence of the images of the *Biddende Handjies* ("The praying hands") and *De Breede en Smalle Weg* (also mentioned in Chapter Three, Fig. 3.10), were no simple expressions of religious sentiment. Against the background of the myth of the project of apartheid as sanctioned by God, blessing the superiority of his chosen people, this elevated the white family's role of ensuring the 'continuation of white civilization in Africa' to a god-given duty. A poster of a scroll bearing Article Two of the constitution of South Africa: "The people of the Republic of South Africa recognize the supremacy and guidance of the almighty God", expresses this unity between religion, politics, and the domestic sphere (as the setting for which this 'wall ornament' is intended) [Fig. 4.16]. The family legitimates the state, which is in turn legitimated and accorded cosmic importance by god.

Figure 4.16 Religious and Political sentiments

The home thus occupies exaggerated importance within the apartheid state. In it, land and family – the animating symbols of Afrikanerdom – converge: its literally being cordoned off in white suburbs is mirrored in the importance of the white family for ensuring the racial purity of the '*nageslag*' for white survival in 'Africa'.

In this chapter, the home has been treated as the starting place for the trail of a sensibility, as well as that ambivalent space where all that is unhomely about modernity – and its particular local configurations during the apartheid period – stirs. Importantly, it is exactly in these attempts to efface these contradictions that they indeed become exaggerated. The same also holds true for the anxious contradictions of the apartheid state, which kitsch also attempts to gloss over. Turning to the next chapter, which explores post-apartheid, or 'ironic' kitsch, these cracks or contradictions will be brought to the fore.

CHAPTER FIVE

Post-Apartheid Kitsch: Between renegotiation and *Rainbow Romanticism*

The fate of kitsch in a post-apartheid state

Kitsch is alive and well in post-1994 South Africa. While one might expect that the fall of apartheid afforded it the opportunity to make its exit as gracefully as Tretchikoff's dying swan and accept its place, along with the grand myths of apartheid, in the Siberia of bad artistic and political taste, this was not to be. The reason for this is that South African kitsch is merely indicative of the 'trajectory' of modernity in a local context. Seen in this light, although kitsch found particular expression during apartheid, it is not limited to this era. Kitsch and apartheid are not one and the same, no matter how attractive such a proposal might seem, and therefore the end of apartheid does not necessarily entail its demise.

Nowhere is this illustrated more clearly than in the myriad of rainbow nation kitsch that has seen the light post-1994. This type of 'rainbow romanticism' can almost be considered to be the 'boerekitsch' of the new regime, as it refers to kitsch which celebrates the rainbow nation in a manner that is often highly superficial and sentimentalized, offering a candy-floss version of the difficulties surrounding the integration of various racial groups in post-1994 South Africa.

On the other hand, one might expect that since the post-apartheid context coincides with the so-called context of postmodernity, this would spell the end of kitsch. As kitsch is positioned as synonymous with modernity, it seems logical that a subversion of kitsch should feature prominently under the conditions of a 'postmodern' cultural moment, which entails the questioning of the assumptions of modernity. Such an expectation calls the following joke to mind: Two professors of art history were traveling along the N2

when they saw an overturned pink Cadillac and a body, thrown from the wreck, lying at the side of the road. Hastily they pulled over to see if they could do anything for the driver. As they came closer, they saw that it was Vladimir Tretchikoff. Unconscious, yet he was still breathing. The two professors were faced with a singular predicament: take a final blow for art's sake, or for the sake of humanity, try to save his life…

Postmodernism does not represent the 'final blow' for kitsch. In the first place, this implies an inadequate understanding of postmodernity as an absolute rupture. As cautioned by both Calinescu and Foucault, postmodernism does not necessarily imply a decisive break with modernity. Postmodernism is premised, largely, on the interrogation of the assumptions of modernity, with which it remains in dialogue. These assumptions have therefore not disappeared absolutely, for as stated earlier, 'vestiges of earlier configurations remain'. In the second place, this might suggest the same expectation of the 'emancipation' of art from bad taste, criticized in Chapter Two.

Rather, the way in which a postmodern approach treats kitsch might perhaps resemble the second option of a more 'humane' outcome. With this I refer to the phenomenon of 'recycled kitsch'. The term refers to the manner in which objects or elements, which can be labeled as kitsch, are used to signal a certain sense of ironic self-awareness from the point of view of the artist/user. As opposed to just being kitsch, it pokes fun at its very status as kitsch, and thereby includes the possibility of making a new statement. Indeed, as Milan Kundera observes, "[a]s soon as kitsch is recognized for the lie it is, it moves into the context of non-kitsch… becoming as touching as any human weakness" (qtd. in Lorand 248).

Revived interest in kitsch appears to be a worldwide phenomenon. I would like to explore 'recycled kitsch' in its South African manifestation where, infused with local flavour and national iconography, it gains momentum as a force for exploring contemporary South African identity. Yet, keeping the above-mentioned reservations regarding postmodernism (and the fact of the existence of 'rainbow nation' kitsch) in mind, ironically-intended kitsch does not mean that kitsch has disappeared altogether.

Furthermore, in keeping with the mode of analysis of geomodernities, by considering local manifestations of postmodernism, this chapter will not be concerned so much with supplying a concrete definition for postmodernity as considering how and for whom it has functioned (Brooker 3). Even when discussing so-called 'recycled' kitsch and the assumptions it criticizes, this chapter will therefore remain critical of its 'liberatory' potential. It will be shown that these liberatory gestures often collapse the boundaries between complicity and resistance.

This chapter is thus at a cross-roads as far as a discussion of kitsch is concerned. The two types of kitsch which it will consider, rainbow nation kitsch and recycled kitsch, represent two widely divergent categories. Yet they present an adequate sense of the trajectory of modernity under the conditions of postmodernity within the present context. Accordingly, I will start with a discussion of recycled kitsch, before proceeding to a consideration of rainbow romanticism.

As concerns the notion of recycled kitsch, or 'kitsch redeemed' it is useful to keep in mind that it primarily concerns the question of intention. As described by Dorfles, "it is precisely because of an awareness of the existence of kitsch" that enables it to be applied to "diametrically opposed ends" (293). As opposed to actual kitsch, 'recycled kitsch' therefore seems to imply a purposeful use of kitsch.

On this point, it perhaps becomes important to emphasize the distinction between the notion of 'recycled kitsch' and the Camp sensibility. Parallels are frequently drawn between the two, but in fact they are not quite comparable with each other. As described by Sontag in *Notes on Camp*, Camp refers to an attitude steeped in aestheticism. It shares a specific affinity for the 'art' of previous eras that today could be regarded as kitsch. As in the case of 'recycled kitsch', these objects or styles are approached in an ironic manner: things only become Camp when regarded from a "Camp perspective" (277). Also, like kitsch – which is not simply limited to objects – Camp can refer to "a vision… a way of looking at things… as well as a quality discoverable in objects and the

behaviour of persons" (277). It can therefore refer to films, clothing, music or even people (277). That is where the similarities end, however.

A Camp use of these forms is usually aimed at reviving certain bygone eras such as the twenties – which are in some way regarded as 'glamorous' – in order to retain something of this sense of allure. This is also true where a Camp predilection for certain films and operas is concerned, insofar as these involve the "glorification of character" (285). As stated by Sontag, Camp approaches "being-as-playing-a-role" (280). "It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater", and relies on the adoption of stylised mannerisms, temperament and gender types, such as those of golden-age Hollywood stars (280). By approaching these personalities as unchanging, fixed types, it signals a belief in the unity of a person (286). Characterized by extravagance, Camp tends towards the theatricalisation of experience (286). I would distinguish recycled kitsch from Camp on the grounds, firstly, of this Camp emphasis on performativity.

Sontag further describes Camp as "a love of the artifice" (275), since, as a certain mode of aestheticism, the Camp sensibility implies "the equivalence of all objects" (289). Insofar as aestheticism involves blocking out content, Camp can be characterized as "disengaged, depoliticized – or at the least apolitical" (277). In a sense, Camp can be said to emulate the 'aristocratic position' in relation to culture – in other words, it is a form of snobbery. 'Recycled' kitsch does not share in the aristocratic posture with relation to culture nor the fetishization of character that Camp embraces. As it is vested more in irony than in aestheticism, it entails a critical treatment of kitsch and the assumptions it espouses, in a manner that can even be actively political, or involve the negotiation of identity, as is the case in the examples at hand.

Turning, then, to a discussion of local manifestations of 'recycled kitsch', I wish to trace the history of this phenomenon, starting with its ascendance during the 1980s *Voëlvry* movement in Afrikaans music, when Afrikaans protest rockers started recycling images from high Afrikaner nationalism in their posters and LP-covers as tools for satirising the dominant regime. Recycled kitsch also enjoyed increasing popularity, it would seem,

appearing in various guises, forms and contexts over the last two decades. Especially since the 1994 transition, it is favoured as a vehicle for celebrating the final moving away or 'fall' of the official myths of the previous regime. This will be discussed when considering the character of Evita Bezuidenhout, the alter ego of comedian Pieter-Dirk Uys. But since its initial 1980s revival, kitsch is enjoying a current 're-revival.' According to Alette Wessels in a recent interview presented in De Kat, Autumn 2005: "Kitsch is definitely making a comeback – with increasing popularity. Kitsch has gotten exciting, it creates a social playground within which society can be questioned, mocked and challenged" (qt Van der Vyfer 32). Moreover, considered in relation to the notion of retro, this gives recycled kitsch a more sustained meaning, especially in terms of the individual strategies that will also be considered, in addition to those of public cultural actors.

A national iconography – such as that provided by the dominant apartheid regime featured in Chapter Three, or the ubiquity of kitsch images as discussed in Chapter Four – provides a pool from which specific objects emerge as significant markers of personal and collective history. Reinterpreted in the manner suggested above, this simultaneously involves the staking out *and* challenging of originary claims of legitimacy and belonging, as well as offering "endless interpretations and potentialities of an ill-experienced history, set against a future not-yet-formed" (Law 94).

Ironically, many of the objects or images torn down in the process of constructing new post-apartheid identities were originally embedded in narratives seeking to foster identity as a stable, unchanging category. Considering their original "sites of construction", such as the FAK and the ATKV, these images relied on the foreclosure of meaning. Yet, as stated by Mbembe, "there will always be a part of the sign that escapes the prison house of our discourse" (127). Thus, these meanings, are never stable, and once divorced from their original context and inserted into a new one, it is possible for a new narrative to emerge. The post-1994 democracy therefore provides a new context from which to reinterpret the assumptions of the previous dispensation, as well as the political imperative for doing so.

As opposed to a totalitarian regime, which seeks out a singular image, one which is representative, thus endeavouring to efface the gap between signifier and signified, and to collapse the divide between civil society and state so that the one speaks through the other, in a democratic society, such mundane moments of collective transcendence are punctuated by healthy doses of individual inspiration. Kitsch must constantly redefine itself, competing for attention alongside various other forms of propaganda, since the consumer can afford to select from a range of potential influences (Law 94).

The recycling of kitsch, especially 'boerekitsch' (as part, amongst other manifestations, of the aesthetics of the *Voëlvry* tour), served the purpose of rendering cracks in the seeming hegemony of apartheid national icons, in that the signifier becomes disentangled from the meaning it is originally assigned to embody. By being placed in a different context, the object or image is "divorced from the criterion of authenticity", and infused – says Law – with new meaning, adding "another narrative to the biography-in-process" (94). Accessing our capacity for disengagement and our imagination, this new context transforms the object of perception, says Dreyfus, "from an actually existing object into a possible object, about which we can form hypotheses and on the basis of which we can make inferences, that is, we have turned the perceptual object into an object of thought" (xxv).

Voëlvry and the rise of 'recycled kitsch'

The *Voëlvry* tour refers to the musical break-away from dominant forms of Afrikaans music by a group of dissenting Afrikaans musicians, who were disaffected with government censorship. For my purposes, however, I am not so much interested in the 'movement' (which is not really a movement as much as a 'moment' in Afrikaans music history)[43] as in its incorporation (and indeed its recycling) of images of Afrikaner culture that legitimated Nationalist aspirations. The latter refers to the archive of myths discussed in Chapter Three and their iconography of *voortrekkernooientjies*, ox wagons, and the

[43]Du Preez, too, notes that although "its social and cultural impact was undoubtedly significant," it is indeed "tempting to overemphasize the political impact of *Voëlvry*" (8).

like, which were mocked in terms of lyrics and musical style. To be sure, rock and roll was highly suspect in the eyes of the National Party, who deemed it a 'communist plot' against which the youth, if not the general public, should be protected. But it is mostly the renegotiation of identity, especially as expressed through attendant paraphernalia such as record covers, banners, posters and publicity photographs, in terms of which the participants in the *Voëlvry* tour chose to represent themselves, that will be my focus[44]. As observed by Drewett:

> [t]he immediacy of the album cover makes it an ideal conduit for musicians and/ or record companies to portray images with which they want audiences to associate their music. Indeed… record covers are a means by which musicians are able 'to express themselves in a medium that is not their medium', an extension of 'the ways they can express themselves'. (116)

The *Voëlvry* 'movement' has to be read in the broader cultural context of 1980s South Africa. The 1980s can be said to be the time when the contradictions inherent in the myths of the National Party began to show, and when the promises made by apartheid were no longer able to be delivered. The supposedly god-given rule by the white minority seemed increasingly unrealistic. It was the time of the "Total Onslaught, countered by the Total Strategy, war, conscription, death squads, […] censorship, boycotts, a general insanity and President P.W. Botha's wagging finger" (Hopkins 16).

Against the backdrop of the country's military involvement in South-West Africa (and later in Angola), as well as increasing corruption coming to light, it was a time during which Afrikaners – and especially the youth – became increasingly disillusioned with the National Party. Cynicism prevailed over "conscription and the militarization of society" and the cozy denial offered by white middle-class suburbia (Du Preez 6). Yet, in this context, culture was even more jealously protected by "the clammy paws of the Broeders and other grey-shoed ooms of Afrikaner nationalism, the kultuurkoeke, the dominiees and Bles Bridges" (6). The cultural goal of the *Voëlvry* rockers was the "emancipation of

[44]Of course, I am not trying to underplay the musical component, as it will shortly be discussed, but merely demarcating the subject matter in terms of the interest in relation to the topic at hand.

Afrikaner youth from the strictures of their authoritarian, patriarchal culture" – referred to by Du Preez as that "unholy traditional Afrikaner culture with its respect for authority and older people" (8).

The first image to be analyzed is that of the LP-cover of the album released after the *Voëlvry* tour, which contained a selection of its most popular songs. On the cover, a woman in Voortrekker clothes jumps ecstatically into the air above the urban Johannesburg landscape [Fig 5.1.]

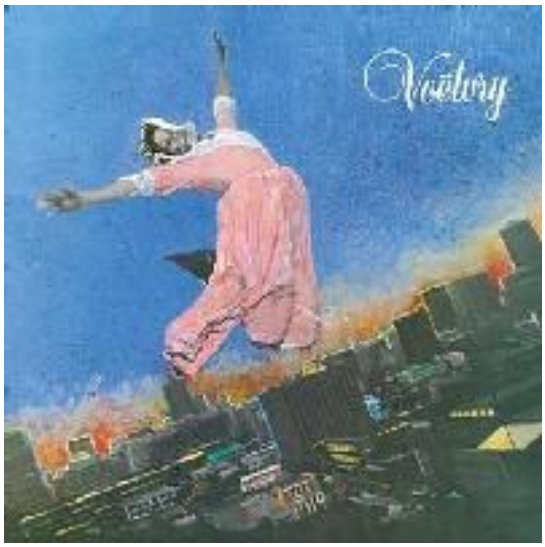


Figure 5.1 *Voëlvry* LP cover: a liberated *voortrekkernooientjie*

Literally 'free as a bird" (as the term '*voëlvry*' indeed implies), the woman in this image is represented as free of the constraints of narrowly-conceived notions of femininity bestowed on her by Afrikaner culture, in the roles of 'vrou en moeder' (mother and wife) were the only functions it had envisaged for her. The 'liberated' *voortrekkkernooientjie*, once the very embodiment of ideals of chastity and modesty, is flying free in the air above the cityscape. Importantly, the city as backdrop is also in contrast with the 'plaas', or indeed the traditional rural identity conferred upon Afrikaners. Considered *vis-à-vis* the series of images of women in traditional Voortrekker clothes discussed in Chapter Three,[45] this image is cut loose from its original context and reinserted in another, one that confers a new meaning on it. As such, the image is literally a 'jump into the future' – the frame contains a shift away from representations of the past to a future as yet not defined, but which is inserted as a possibility.

Moreover, the woman pictured here is ambiguous. Looking at her face, obscured by the *kappie,* it is hard to tell whether or not she is coloured, or a man in drag? The *kappie*,

[45]Fig. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.15.

once a source of stable identification, indeed a national icon of the volk, has become a source of confusion. Cut loose from its original context, the image is suddenly available for a host of new interpretations. The traditional Voortrekker attire is no longer a stable referent, which it never was in the first place, although it was positioned as such by Afrikaner nationalists.

The next image is that of a t-shirt worn by Koos Kombuis[46], bearing a cartoon of a '*voortrekker-nooientjie*' pictured as a dominatrix [Fig 5.2]. Explicitly sexualised (as opposed to being the paragon of chastity), she is portrayed moreover as being in control of her own sexuality. In her hands she has a whip – a symbol of white male authority applied to the domestication of animals and women, as well as the disciplining of colonised peoples, who have to be 'inducted into civilization' (McClintock 35). Voortrekker women are usually portrayed as passively seated at the Voortrekker man's side. The man, whip in his hand, holds the reigns as the 'driving force' behind the oxen (and indeed behind the white civilizing mission based on subjugation and control). Snatched from the hands of patriarchy as a symbol of male domination, the whip is here turned against the male himself as a disciplinary tool.

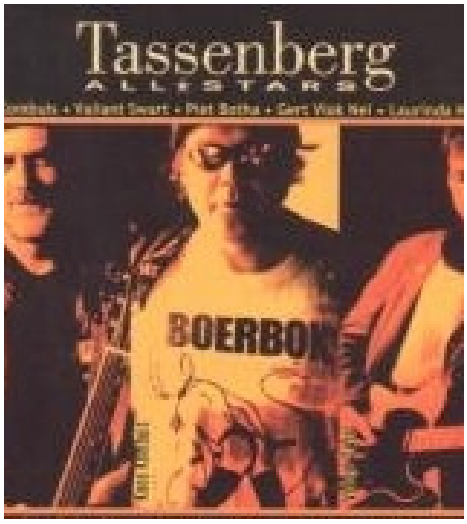


Figure 5.2 A *voortrekkernooitjie* dominatrix

The image is conceived, no doubt, as a means to provoke the dominant regime, rather than as an outright concern with 'women's liberation' or 'women's rights' per se. As pointed out by Pretorius, *Voëlvry* was very much a male movement (26). Thus, although it serves as an example of the recycling of a kitsch image, its level of self-awareness does not extend to the way in which it utilises images of women in a manner that is akin to the function which women fulfilled in Nationalist discourse – where women were "boundary makers, visibly upholding the fetish signs of national difference and visibly embodying

[46]Afrikaans musician who participated in the *Voëlvry* tour.

the iconography of race and gender purity" (McClintock 377). As such, this image highlights the ambiguity at work in many reconsiderations or reappraisals of kitsch, one that renders unstable the boundary between its libratory capacity and complicity.

The term *Voëlvry*, literally translated as 'as free as a bird' (signalling the obvious move away from the oppressive roles prescribed by Apartheid cultural legislators), is further ambiguous. In Afrikaans colloquial speech, the word '*voël*' is slang for the penis. This additional connotation of "letting your cock swing free" carries connotations of sexual freedom and free love outside the confines of a repressive Afrikaans culture steeped in Calvinist values, one that idealised chastity and conjugal monogamy (Hopkins 14).

Many of these 'stabs' at the iconography of the apartheid regime involved the introduction of sex – explicitly repressed by this regime – as a disruptive force. As put by Max du Preez, "Afrikaans suddenly became sexy" (6). Explicit sexualisation served as a reintroduction of the real, banished by the discourses of apartheid ideology. No discussion of using sexual references to rework 'boerekitsch' would be complete without the mention of *Bittercomix*. Notorious for its often explicit content and harsh critique of the myths of Afrikanerdom, this decidedly "adult" cartoon relies on the derision (or indeed the desecration) of the iconography of Afrikaner Nationalism, especially its focus on "volk, skool, taal en kerk" (nation, school, the Afrikaans language and the NG church).

Consider then, the cover of *Bitterkomix 7* [fig 5.3]. On it is a portrayal of an ideal type: the blond and blue eyed Afrikaner school girl. She sports two ponytails, a symbol both of youthful innocence as a hairstyle associated with young girls, and of discipline and authority, in that it was one of the few hair-styles allowed in South African public schools which prescribed strict dress-codes for hair, nails and accessories. Contrasted with her bare shoulders, however, the hairstyle adds a playful element to her sexuality, as well as signalling defiance of the strict Christian National school system with its vehemently repressive attitude towards sexuality. Decidedly cheeky, she assumes the fetish image of the 'naughty school girl,' emphasized by her sticking out her tongue. She is a 'tease.'

She also literally 'sticks out her tongue' as an act of defiance at the symbols of the role Afrikanerdom had bequeathed its 'daughters'. At the bottom left of the image, a lightning bolt strikes down on the church. Instead of alluding to the wrath of god, it seems to suggest the disruption of Satan. The cartoonist taunts the symbol of the church by introducing the ever present threat of the "antichrist". Secondly, there is a baby (symbolizing motherhood). Yet the baby only has one bootie on, creating connotations of a 'shoddy mom' who doesn't take good care of her children, emphasized by the girl's cheeky stance and 'don't care' attitude – she clearly isn't interested in making babies. Moreover, the fact that the bootie is pink suggests a baby girl. The flow of generations is disrupted in this image, as the chain of Afrikaner mothers raising good Afrikaner daughters who in turn will make good Afrikaner mothers is broken.

Figure 5.3 The cover of Bittercomix Seven

Thirdly, there is a school shoe (standing for school, discipline and Christian National education). The apartheid school served as a microcosm of the broader values of the apartheid state. Although it contained the direct initiation into militarism for boys – through the compulsory participation in the cadettes – its disciplining of the Afrikaner girl was perhaps more subtle, but no less insidious, in order to prepare her for her role as 'servant and helpmate.' Next, the springbok bust alludes to rugby, which served as the emblem of heterosexual manhood, a symbol of the male type idealised in Afrikaner culture - and thus what the Afrikaner girl is supposed to desire. Finally, there is the

teacup, which stands for all the pleasantries and niceties of middle-class culture, such as embodied in the tea-party, as well as the society life of the good Afrikaner wife, where the cup of tea features ubiquitously at the meetings of women's groups such as the school committee meeting, or the bible study group (i.e. the life trained for in school – as symbolized by the shoe).

The discussion to this point has focused on the re-negotiation of the image of the *voortrekkernooientjie* as the once dominant symbol of Afrikaner womanhood. To return to the *Voëlvry* tour, however, I will now focus on another image that received extensive treatment: the ox wagon. In *Voëlvry* representations of the ox wagon, the Johannes Kerkorrel song "*Rock en roll ossewa*" (Rock 'n Roll ox wagon) was an important point of reference. The song featured a new-style ox wagon, powered by an engine to drive a new generation of Afrikaners out of the traditional past and into the future.[47] As stated by Pretorius, this could also be a reference to Lloyd Ross of *Shifty Records* who, with his mobile recording studio, was the literal 'driving force' behind the *Voëlvry* tour. More generally:

> [t]his new-style *ossewa* was the symbolic 1980s vehicle in which thousands of disaffected Afrikaner youth broke free and drove away from the laager where 'their parents had fucked-up everything.' The motorized ox wagon in which they could embark on a journey of discovery away from the suffocating myth of a chosen people in a la-la land of braaivleis, rugby and sunny skies. (Hopkins14)

Importantly, this "driving away from the laager" of their parents' mistakes was no attempt at a second (or indeed, a third) trek on the part of Afrikaner youth, in the sense of an attempt to preserve their specific identity as Afrikaners. Rather, it pointed towards these ideals being abandoned completely, as they had become too constricting.

[47]Thus, once again, the ox wagon is used as a symbol for the inauguration of the future, yet in a manner that is much more radical than the juxtapositions between the car and automobile in the advertisements discussed in Chapter Two.

Figure 5.4 "Rock 'n roll ossewa"

In this sense, therefore, the image of the members of the *Voëlvry* tour, pictured here in front of a backdrop painted with the motorized ox wagon, is of interest [Fig. 5.4]. Visible at the back of the ox wagon are exhaust pipes, and rear-view mirrors are added at the front. In addition, the white tarpaulin over the wagon – painted in the 'peace and love' style of the sixties – looks more like a hippy shag-wagon than the pristine vehicle in which white civilisation was carried into 'darkest Africa'. The band of individuals gathered in front of the wagon resembles a group of hobos – a colourful mix of characters, with long hair and clothing of various styles. They would certainly be regarded as frumpily dressed, the same criticism as made of Goldblatt's photographs in relation to the individuals whom he portrayed, in order to claim that they were not 'real Afrikaners' (see Chapter Four). As suggested, too, by the African hats featured by two members in this amalgam of styles, they have no desire to present themselves as 'pure Afrikaners'.

This backdrop was used as the stage background during various performances [Fig. 5.5]. Considering the sacredness with which the Afrikaner endowed the ox wagon, as reflected in the number of monuments erected in its image [Fig. 5.6], this appropriation of one of its emblems by a bunch of cultural pranksters, or 'boere punks', did not sit well with the 'jealous protectors' of Afrikaner culture.

Figure 5.5 Oxwagon backdrop

Figure 5.6 Various ossewa monuments

Publicity images taken of the *Voëlvry* rockers consistently portray them against an urban backdrop [Fig 5.7]. As in the case of the *voortrekkernooientjie* above the Johannesburg skyline, the group chose to represent itself as urban, as opposed to the traditional rural identity based on affinity with 'the land' claimed for Afrikaners. Land often served as an ambiguous signifier in the construction of the Afrikaner identity, sometimes drawn upon, sometimes disavowed. Yet even when ambiguous, it was retained in order to legitimise the modern Afrikaner identity established through this very disavowal, and not in terms of a decisive break with the past such as suggested here.

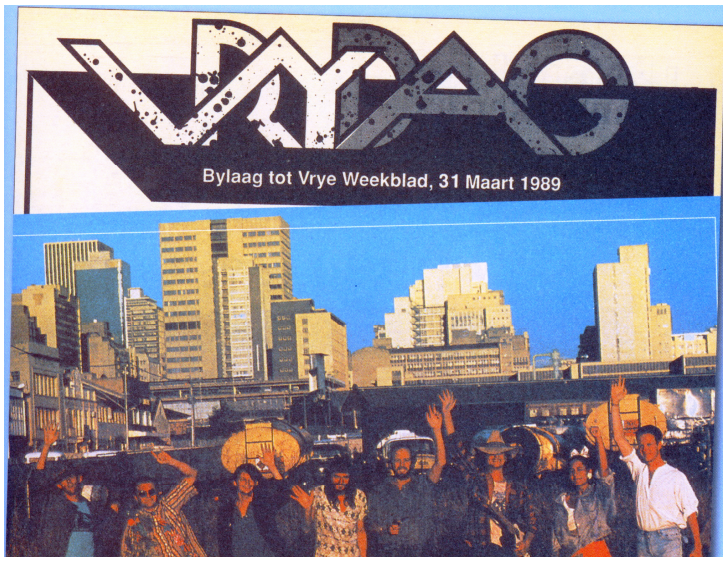


Figure 5.

Figure 5.7 The *Voëlvry* rockers chose to be portrayed against a consistently urban background.

A discussion of the 're-cycling' of the images belonging to Afrikaner Nationalism would not be complete without reference to that other bastion of Afrikanerdom – the Voortrekker Monument. Moving on then from the cultural appropriations of *Voëlvry*, I will consider the following singular interpretation of the hallowed grounds of Monument *koppie* that appeared in the *Loslyf* of June 1995 (Coombes 25).

Loslyf was "a new Afrikaans-language porn magazine, published by the owners of the Afrikaans edition of *Hustler*" which had just hit the market (25). Roughly translated, the title meant 'loose body'. The edition in question contained a spread entitled 'Indigenous

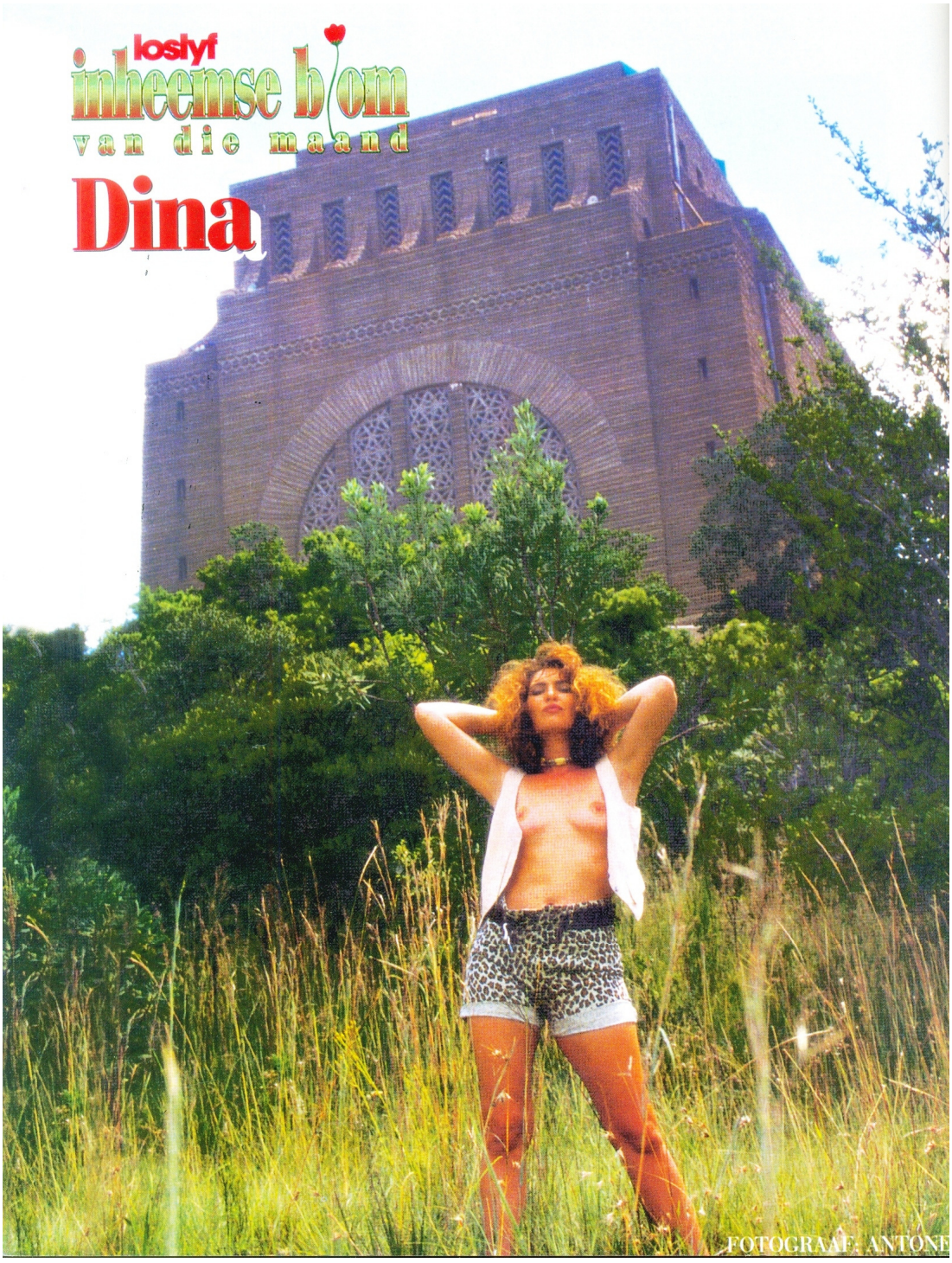


Figure 5.8 From Pretoria with love: Loslyf's "Indigenous Flower of the Month"

Flower of the Month', in which 'Dina', a "twenty-four year-old nurse from Pretoria" (25), frolicked in the long grass at the foot of the Voortrekker-monument, clad only in a pair of leopard print shorts and an unbuttoned safari vest [Fig. 5.8]. As Coombes

explains, the conjunction of image and text in this shoot represents more than just the usual disrespect for the boundaries between the sacred and the profane (25).

In order to fully appreciate the significance of the images in question, she sketches the following context. In the first place, the magazine's editors saw as their readership the emerging "Afrikaner lower-middle class constituency, along with a coterie of middle-class Afrikaner dissenters and intellectuals, (who provided the bulk of the editorial staff) who were in 1995 even more intent on differentiating themselves from those ideally addressed by the symbolic litany of the Voortrekker Monument" (25). In the context of "years of state censorship in South Africa", the magazine itself – and the spread in particular – serves as a "slap in the face of Calvinist Puritanism of Afrikaner nationalists" by desecrating one of its most revered symbols (25). Also, Dina stands in direct contrast to the traditional conception of the Afrikaner woman, "the prettiest and most precious little jewel, indeed the wealth of our nation" (Willemse 14).

Coombes also highlights the following elements that ensured its "effectiveness in a South African context" (25). Firstly, it is claimed that 'Dina' is in fact one of the great-grandchildren of Gen. Andries Hendrik Potgieter, "one of the central figures in the Great Trek narrative" (25). As mentioned in Chapter Three with regard to monuments commemorating the myths of Afrikanerdom, these were invariably inaugurated by some

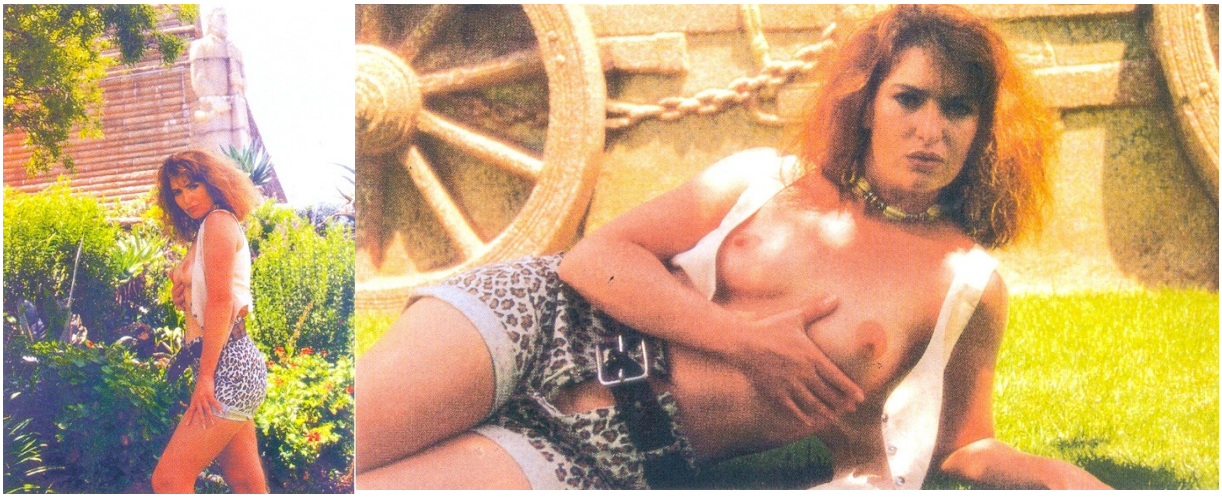


Figure 5.9 and 5.10 "Dina" frolicking at the foot of the Voortrekker Monument

individual, bearing a silver mason, supposedly the distant relative of one of the heroes of the Great Trek or the Anglo Boer War, thus signalling the obsession with 'pure bloodlines' that governed Apartheid thinking. The claims made by *Loslyf* is an obvious deriding of the importance attached to the '*nageslag*' in carrying forth the traditions of Afrikanerdom, as Gen. Potgieter would surely have turned in his grave at the thought of his 'granddaughter' cum porn-star [Fig. 5.9 and 5.10].

Secondly, portraying her in the open air, "amid the long grasses at the foot of the monument" (25), plays on the Voortrekkers' ambiguous relationship to nature:

> Traditionally, the relationship to the concept of nature is a complex one. The idea of the Trekkers as 'a child of the South African Wilderness' was a myth obviously calculated to enhance the Trekkers' claim to the land through demonstrating a special affinity with the rugged natural environment. (Coombes 25)

In contrast to such a bucolic relationship to nature, however, McClintock emphasizes the manner in which land is often sexualized in the metaphors of colonial conquest (16). Coombes suggests that this "conforms credibly with most of the basic requirements for pornographic writing. The conceit of Dina as an 'indigenous flower' plays with the implicitly sexual content of such an ideology and the violence that underscores it" (25).

The image also plays on the ambivalent image of the Voortrekker woman, who, on the one hand, is depicted as the "demure Calvinist homemaker and the procreator of the Boer nation," such as the woman portrayed at the foot of the monument, entitled "*Vrou en Moeder*" ("Wife and Mother) [Fig. 5.11] (25). However, there is also the more sexually alluring image suggested by "the Boer woman's warrior status" – that of the Amazon who can load guns alongside her man in battle [Fig. 5.12], which is suggested here by Dina, in her sexy safari outfit (25).

Figure 5.11 ***Vrou en Moeder***

Figure 5.12 An 'Amazon' loading guns

As Coombes argues, although there are "many levels on which such appropriations might work as potentially transgressive strategies in relation to the myths of Afrikaner nationalism," she also highlights the following problem (43). The image, despite its attempts at subversion, "is still consumed within the context of pornography," that might "mediate any critical edge by turning back on itself, since the potential exposure of the sexualized violence of colonial and fascist discourse can itself become a source of titillation in its consumption as pornography" (43).

Volli, too, raises the objection that a discussion of kitsch (or even ironic kitsch) might be related to pornography – for does pornography not imply bad taste per definition, "beyond any aesthetic consideration" as it exists solely for mindless consumption (224)? According to him, however, all pornography is not necessarily kitsch per se, but there

exists a definite difference between pornography and 'pornokitsch' as such. In line with Judith Butler, he argues:

> [th]e facts of sex have never been purely instinctual or physiological in man; they have always been pregnant with cultural, ritual, religious and sentimental significance. Both pornography and pornokitsch are cultural and historical illustrations of man's attitude to sex. The first is a particular type of eroticism, slowly deformed by repression and morbidity, the second is false, sickly, sugary and slightly cold-blooded pornography, adapted for kitsch-man (224).

Pornokitsch is described by Volli as "the kitsch of Eros", born out of the *Kitschmensch*'s "inability either to take his sex raw or to be ashamed of it or to admit the existence of a radically negative component within himself" (226). Thus, sex "has to be made into an aesthetic or a scientific thing, either beautiful to behold or important to know, which would have no call on his personal responsibilities, but which can be looked upon with sentiment" (226). And as opposed to the "radical negativity" which Volli attributes to pornography, pornokitsch makes use of "a cycle of autonegation, euphemism and mystification", portraying sex in "falsely simple and natural situations intended to justify the pornography" (245). For example, "[n]ature is an element often used in pornokitsch to create an effect of 'spontaneity' and 'purity,' both of which the medium has already definitely destroyed" (237).

The image we have been considering is therefore quite complex, in that it utilizes these apparent 'pornokitsch' elements in such a manner that it ridicules the mythogogic projections of the Apartheid state. Indeed, editor Ryk Hattingh had a colourful history in relation to anti-state censorship campaigns (Coombes 43). According to him, "Afrikaners have always been portrayed as khaki-clad repressed people and I wanted to show them as normal, sexual, f*cking human beings" (Peffer online). The manner in which Hattingh proceeds to debunk Afrikaner myths inserts the above-mentioned images into a critical register not really intended for the medium of pornokitsch on which they draw.

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Retro – a strategy for negotiating the past

Moving away from the explicit recycling of Afrikaner myths, I will proceed to discuss the use of kitsch objects within the home, but as opposed to the matter-of-fact integration of these, I will focus on the way in which kitsch, incorporated in these instances, is expressive of a sensibility that uses these elements in a playful or ironic way.

According to Low, although "kitsch is generally understood to mean cheap and tawdry… for a growing number of people, the word is no longer pejorative" (par. 1). And although there is no dictionary that yet defines this trend, it is becoming increasingly popular (par. 1). Using reinvented kitsch in the home celebrates:

> the art of cool imitation, fantastic escapism, and nostalgia for late 20th-century populist culture that lies at the heart of this lighthearted and contemporary design style, [creating] a feeling of irreverence and fantasy in homes while still maintaining a semblance of style and glamour… Think flying ducks, lava lamps, bubblegum colours, Hawaiian-styled interiors and Elvis rocking dolls. (*Buy.com* par. 1)

In South Africa, too, over the last few years, Van der Vyver observes that

> it has become fashionable to add a little kitsch touch, dug up from the old family chest or acquired in a stealthy way (referring to the old bric-a-brac shop at the wrong end of town, where you wouldn't be seen dead, of course), as an object of personal expression. (35)

Like the statements on identity considered in relation to the cultural strategies of the various actors discussed so far, the use of 'reinvented kitsch' in the home also refers to a critical interpretation of the past, although it comes to bear rather on private statements, signalled through the choices made by individuals in the privacy of their own homes. Furthermore, what is important here is that using kitsch in this manner expresses a 'Retro sensibility' on the part of the user.

As Guffey observes in *Retro – the culture of revival,* although Retro is easily dismissed as a "modish fad", lacking any serious content, or merely a "backward glance at the past" by a throw-away culture ever in search of new forms, "the nuances underlying its appeal are often overlooked" (8). Put simply, Retro can be defined as "a revival of recent styles", but significantly, these are limited to the bygone styles of the recent past, such as the kitsch styles referred to above (9). It is therefore a characteristically new sensibility, which sets it apart from earlier types of revivalism, such as that of the nineteenth century, when an increasingly formal and systematic approach to history also stimulated an interest in the revival of earlier forms in order to "express contemporary themes of romanticism and nationalism", or the nostalgic yearning for the 'authentic' described in Chapter Four (9).

As Guffey explains, Retro is unconcerned with the glancing back to the styles of the past, through the lenses of "misty romanticism" (9). Its focus is limited to styles of the recent past, such as the style of the immediate post-war years, American culture at mid-century, or fashions of the sixties or seventies. Importantly, these styles are used in a manner that combines the characteristics from various periods, signalling no interest in historical accuracy and showing "little concern with the sanctity of tradition, or reinforcing social values" (11), as was often demonstrated to be the objective of nostalgic kitsch. Retro therefore "insinuates a form of subversion" (10). In the first place, this is achieved through ignoring attention to historical detail. As Guffey explains:

> Retro quotes styles from the past, but applies them in anomalous settings, it regards the past from a bemused distance. Its dark humor re-mixing popular mid-century drinks and serving them as atomic cocktails. (10)

In the second place, by taking the styles from the "older, yet modern periods" as inspiration, retro thus literally takes a step backwards, as opposed to the "positivist progressivism" characteristic of the 'Modern' era. As it is unsentimental in its concern with the "artistic and popular culture of the industrial age" (13), Retro's stance towards modernity is deeply ambivalent. More essentially, says Guffey, "it gently nudges us away

from older ideas of 'modernity' and towards an uncharted future" (10). Its backward glance "challenges the positivist views of technology, industry, and most of all, progress itself" (13).

As opposed to "evading the symptoms of modernity", which certainly fuelled nostalgic kitsch, Retro grapples with the ideas of Modernity, its limitations, "and even its mortality" (13). It is a stance devoid of the seriousness of intent that defines all revivalist approaches to history. In contrast, Retro is characterized by a sense of detachment, and involves an ironic stance that does not seek out "a proud example of the past" but rather rummages "through history's unopened closets and unlit corners" (14).

Retro thus suggests a fundamental shift, according to Guffey, in the "popular relationship to the past" (10). Jameson observes that "as a society develops, it finds new ways to tell itself its own history" (qtd. in Guffey 8). Therefore Retro places "the 'modern' firmly in the past tense" (21) as its technological optimism and utopian belief in progress no longer seem viable. It regards modernity – and the stylistic imperatives of modern design, in its incessant drive towards the new – as "a dead end and above-all, monotonous" (21). By looking back to past styles, Retro is therefore both an attempt to invigorate contemporary design as well as a portrayal of modernity as "the future that never was", by exhibiting the conviction that modernity is, and has always been, "limited in historical scope" (22).

The proliferation of Postmodernism in the 1980s gave Retro a more sustained meaning. Retro is criticized by authors such as Baudrillard as an example of "the eclipse of history" in contemporary culture, which he regards as "irredeemably historicist, in the bad sense of an omnipresent and indiscriminate appetite for dead styles and fashions" (22). He argues:

> history has retreated, leaving behind an indifferent nebula, traversed by currents, but emptied by references [to the past]… As is characteristic of a world transformed by mediated imagery and temporal rupture, suggesting stylistic forms that point to a kind of cultural amnesia. (22)

However, Guffey argues that through its increasing popularity, Retro has come to define the past "in new ways in the popular imagination" (27), as adoption by the mainstream "has made retro profitable, but also rendered it intelligible" (27). Retro, even as expressed in personal choices, does not involve a private, documentary, formal or academic engagement with the past, but instead expresses a communal memory of a recent past that has become public property (27). In answer, therefore, to Baudrillard's criticism that "retro demythologizes the past, distancing the present from the 'big' ideas that drove the modern age", and contributes to the growing problem that in a Postmodern age we are losing touch with the real, Guffey asserts that, as a new form of relating to the past, Retro does not remove, but rather invests the past with meaning, as it signals a specific relationship to the ideals of modernity (29).

We come, then, more specifically to how recycled kitsch can be used in the private space of the home. Although this will largely refer to the choices of private individuals, they nevertheless engage with the position that Retro occupies in the popular imagination, and express the impulse to redefine the past in terms of their personal engagement with it.

Concerning the use of 'recycled kitsch', Van der Vyver warns that in order for it to be successful, "you must have elevated self-ridicule to a form of art, as the trick is to know exactly where, how and to what degree to apply it. Ducks against the wall because you think it looks pretty and because your neighbour thinks so as well, is not cool. Those ducks will have to say something, and you will have to be able to join in the conversation" (35).

To illustrate the use of 'recycled kitsch' in the home, I should like to contrast the following image of this wall, covered in a myriad of these ducks taking off in various directions [Fig 5.13], with a more conventional example, such as the one provided in Chapter 4 [Fig 4.4]. The manner in which the ducks have been arranged on this wall departs from its conventional use, marked by repetition in numerous homes. Indeed, this excess signals self-awareness of the manner in which this feature is endlessly repeated,

Figure 5.13 A Retro profusion of ducks

by elevating it to the level of a pattern. Furthermore, the excess of ducks overplays the decorative pretensions of the original kitsch arrangement and signals a mocking attitude.

This is also the case with the interior shown in Fig. 4.14, with its excess of exotic references. The wall-paper of an exotic island is paired with three flying ducks and a zebra skin couch. Indeed, these would not be used as such by the *kitschmensch,* intent on preserving the illusion of either one of these elements, an illusion which is exposed when they are all placed together like this.

Figure 5.14 Exoticism squared

When looking at kitsch in the South African home, I will refer here to a *De Kat* photo-spread which featured some South Africans with their 'kitsch' interiors on display, such as the collection belonging to Hevette van Rooyen (Van der Vyver 37) [Fig 5.15]. What makes the objects she collects different from those used in the interiors discussed in Chapter Four, is that these were acquired with ironic-intent, and therefore they do not embrace the middle-class ideals of domesticity which they embody. Furthermore, the use of objects from yester-year, deemed as bad taste in the present, can also refer to a sense of ridicule in the face of the demands of current styles. Moreover, the objects in her home all have a highly personal history with regard to the manner in which she obtained them – either given as gifts by friends, or found after a great deal of trouble in the corner of a bric-a-brac shop (37). This contrasts with the impersonal manner in which most kitsch is acquired, in that, at the time when it is bought, it is readily available, but from a retrophile's position, has to be actively sought for.


Kitsch, maar o so *cool*. Hevette le Grange, TV-aanbieder en DEKAT-joernalis, wys haar *coolste* kitsch en DuPreez Strauss, musikant en kabaretsanger/skrywer paradeer in syne.

HEVETTE SE VERSAMELING:

Ek het gedroom van partytjie onder die borne en dat ek die *turqoise outfit* dra. Was arm, maar het materiaal gaan koop en rok laat maak. (Die toppie is bietjie knap, so moet altyd mooi regop sit.) Die Tretchikoff-coasters het ek by Kitsch & Cool gekoop. So mooi, ek kry seer as gaste actually hul klam glase daarop sit! Die blik was R3 by 'n markie in Kleinmond – 'n gelukkige dag, na die skiet van 'n vriend se kortfilm in Hermanus, waarin ek 'n lekker rol gehad het. Die sout-en-peper potjies kom van dieselfde markie en dis net vir vertoon! Die "Redders in die ruimte"-boekie is van my vriend Krisjan Fourie. Dit kom uit sy skooldae, sulke mooi Afrikaans ... Ek het ook die oranje plastieklepels by hom afgesmeek. Die groot koffiefles met pienk blomme is Mr. Price Home s'n. Dan is daar die blou kussing met die vroue gesig daarop. My ma, Amelia, het soos sy gelyk as jong meisie. Dit maak my net gelukkig om daarna te kyk. Gekoop ten duurste by Bread & Butter in die Kaap.

Figure 5.15 A retrophile's collection

Rather than lapse into an endless list of descriptions of such 'recycled kitsch' elements, or overemphasizing the 'subversive potential' of these, I would like to raise question of its perceived subversive power. As put by Calinescu, when offering an ironic perspective on kitsch as highest measure of taste, the result is "kitsch squared" (253). Sontag, too,

remarks that Camp (insofar as it shares this characteristic with recycled kitsch) is deeply snobbish. Moreover, when brought to bear on the South African context, along with the recycling of general kitsch aspects or objects, these are often paired with the inclusion of a 'boerekitsch' object from an apartheid past, thus indicating – alongside a sceptical rejection of modernity, such as described above with reference to Retro in general – an ironic stance towards the national past. To return to the question of snobbism, however, this point is emphasized by Van der Vyver, in citing that most kitsch enthusiasts are yuppies, or "dinky (double income, no kitsch yet) couples" who, by balancing a bit of kitsch next to their minimalistic, feng shui-inspired interiors, can assert that "with my yoga-perfect body, I'm still a boer" (35). As this very statement implies, these individuals clearly have the resources to 'afford' an ironic position in relation to kitsch. In addition, heritage becomes something commercial when these objects, which serve as markers of personal history and belonging, acquire the status of a commodity.

Concerning modern nostalgia, Hall and Bombardella distinguish between reflective and restorative nostalgia. In the case of reflective nostalgia, the longing for the past becomes paired with commodities, and expresses a desire to possess history through the consumption of objects which have some sort of connection to a real or imagined past. Restorative nostalgia, in contrast, is the very real recovery of remnants from the past in order to provide collective groups of people with a point of reference for orienting themselves to the future. The possession of kitsch objects by individuals often becomes caught in the trappings of reflective nostalgia, whereas the collection of kitsch elements in order to reinterpret the past by a collective effort can best be considered, perhaps, with regard to *Evita se Perron* in Darling.

'Evita from Pretoria' was originally the alter ego of comedian Peter-Dirk Uys in his weekly column in the 1978 *Sunday Express.* She soon became so popular that he took to the stage with the formidable personage of Evita Bezuidenhout, former ambassador to the homeland of Bapetikosweti and widow of the N.P. Member of Parliament, Dr J.J. de V Bezuidenhout (38). His one-man (or one-woman) shows rely on sharp satire, and over the years Evita has become increasingly politically involved in the topical issues of the day.

Figure 5.16 Evita, pictured in her 'nauseum'

My interest, however, lies in the old station building in Darling that Uys has purchased and transformed into a theatre-restaurant, currently home to 'South Africa's most famous woman'. Called *Evita se Perron*, it also houses "the greatest collection of 'boerekitsch' in the world. Called a museum by some and a nauseum by others, you will find '*Die Slag van Bloedrivier*' hanging next to '*Piet Retief se Moord in die Kraal*,' while '*Ons bou 'n Nasie*' balances '*Wat is 'n huis sonder 'n moeder*'" (Kemp 38) [Fig 5.16]. *Evita se Perron* is painted bright pink on the exterior, and the interior of the restaurant relies heavily on the use of fake flowers, fruit bowls with fake fruit, fifties-style vinyl furniture, and fairy lights. Indeed, the kitsch ensemble also extends to the outdoor garden, where "Boerassic Park" provides an exhibition of icons from past and present. *Evita se Perron* therefore serves as a site for a collective engagement with the past more in line with the practices of restorative nostalgia than with reflective nostalgia.

'Primitivism' reconsidered

Coming, then, more specifically to the place assigned to the people in these attempts at repositioning kitsch, I will also stand still at a reconsideration of the notion of

'primitivism' by looking at the art of Esther Mahlangu. Chapter Four examined how 'ethnic art' could only be included in the home insofar as it could be regarded as embedded in timeless, harmless traditions, posing no threat to the supremacy of white culture. The way in which Esther Mahlangu applies the supposedly unchanging traditional practice of Ndebele painting, however, turns such a conception of tradition on its head.

Considering the Ndebele painting, it is not nearly as naive as primitivism positions tradition to be. During the apartheid years, painting their houses in bold patterns and colours acted as a form of protest. Through the decoration of their homes, these Ndebele women engaged in a 'politics of visibility' in response to a politics based on exclusion. Also, as opposed to the notion of tradition as unchanging, tradition did indeed adapt to changing circumstances in this instance. Importantly, these were political circumstances, inserting tradition into the realm of modernity, from which it is often excluded. Moreover, these illustrate the creative modifications that traditional art forms underwent in the face of contact with the West (and its technological advances, which introduced the possibility, for example, of the use of brightly coloured acrylic paint, as opposed to the natural pigments used previously). Also, it presents a view of tradition as being potentially flexible and accommodating – a stance that is indeed denied by a position which condemns tradition to an unchanging past. Of course, this is not accommodated in the authenticity paradigm, according to which traditional identities must be disavowed if assimilation into modernity is to be achieved.

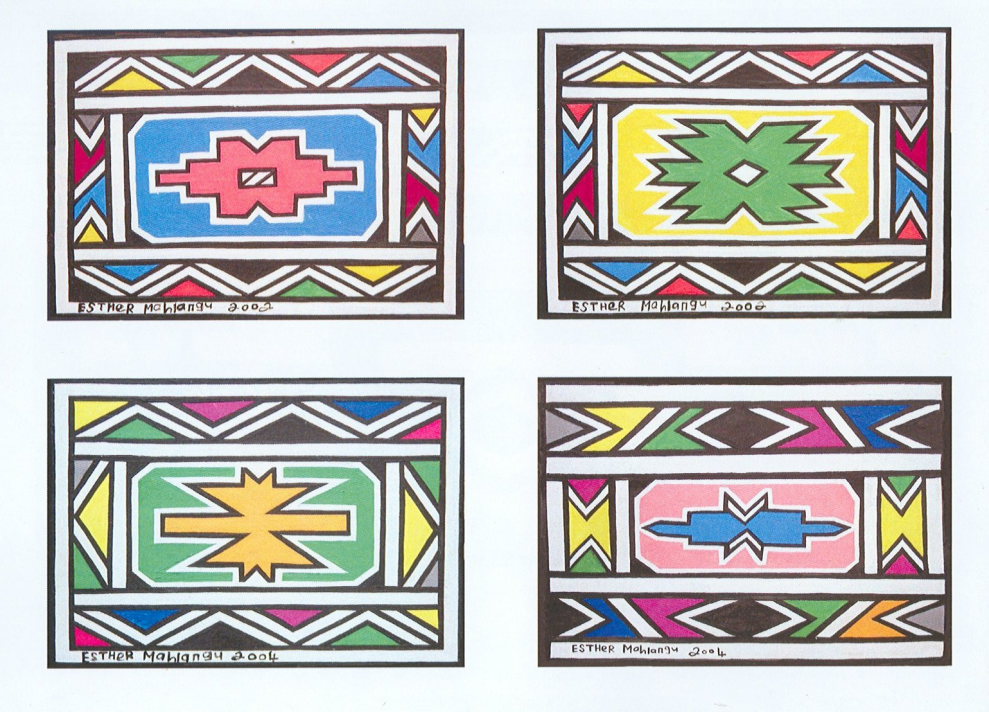

Figure 5.17 Asserting authorship

In the next collection of images [Fig 5.17], the individual Ndebele designs are all signed by the artist, asserting her authorship and individuality which are often considered anathema to traditional art, as this ruptures the conception of the ethnic type as a homogenous group with uniform beliefs and traditions of expression. Mahlangu's art ruptures such perceptions. Kauffman regards Mahlangu's work as "a unified body of this work based primarily on the reinterpretation of a number of iconic objects and artefacts laden with complex, deep, and often troubling references to the Apartheid era" (4). Yet, in her treatment of these, she effects a "subtle and yet provocative reacquiring of South Africa's cultural heritage" (4).

For example, the following relief, "depicting van Riebeeck's ship, the Drommedaris, arriving in Table Bay is meant to elicit notions of power and the civilizing effect of the Europeans (3). However, Mahlangu's covering the scene in her signature style of painting offers a reinterpretation of these sentiments. This is not a denigrating act. Instead, it is "meant to remind the viewer that there is another past to consider as well, and that those

Figure 5.18 Re-claiming history

disadvantaged by policies set in motion as far back as 1652 have a history that needs to be reacquired" (3-4) [Fig 4.18].

Other works, which Kauffman describes as "painted symbols of the country's racially divided past", such as the coat of arms of the South African Police [Fig 5.19] refers to more recent 'symbols of domination'. Ironically, both these objects refer to practices or apparatuses (the history of colonialism and the apartheid police) that functioned to divest South Africans of their cultural heritage, by rendering these as inferior or invalid. Yet, the way in which these are approached, is by allowing the original object to remain in its original form, while adding traditional references in order to create "wholly

Figure 5.19 The new South African Police

reconfigured imagery" (4). Instead of denigrating the original, a "certain co-existence" is signalled (4).

Mahlangu's art can consequently be described as an act of "repositioning and regrounding", which imbues objects "with a fuller sense of history" (4). It evokes its affectivity from this sense of reclaiming the "sense of history denied to the majority of people in South Africa" (4).

Figure 5.20 ***Flocking together*** **(and detail)**

Finally, the image of a collection of ducks entitled "flocking together" [Fig 5.20] serves as a good supplement to earlier discussions of a reappropriation of this very hallmark of kitsch in the home. It introduces Africa as signifier banished from the cosy setting of middle-class suburbia. Considered in terms of the title (*Flocking Together*), which plays on the adage that "Birds of a feather flock together", the image also comments on the tendency amongst South Africans to form groups along racial lines, and to 'huddle together', not only in terms of the white middle-class suburbs, insulated by kitsch as such, but as a general tendency to 'keep together' along the divides of ethnicity.

The question is whether these attempts at re-negotiating identities through recycled kitsch do not remain locked, to some extent, in moving back and forth between the two poles of the past and the present, apartheid and post-apartheid, or African and Western identities.

Furthermore, with reference to Bhabha's conception of the 'Third Space', do these renegotiations necessarily involve an identity that is actually new, in terms of the definition he provides for hybridity? As opposed to the negative connotations associated with the notion of hybridity, such as described in the previous chapter, where mixing between cultures is seen as a 'weakening of the racial stock' or detracting from both cultures involved, Bhabha emphasises the positive elements of hybridity. To him, it is something that is distinctly located in a colonial context – created in the process of an attempt on the part of the colonial government to translate the identity of the colonised into its own terms. Yet, in the process, something new is created, which is not exactly from the one or the other original identity (Meredith 2). For Bhabha:

> the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity is to me the 'Third Space', which enables other positions to emerge (Rutherford qtd. in Meredith 2).

It is, then, in this 'Third Space', located at the 'boundary' between two cultures, that hybridity emerges as a productive, reflective space, blurring existing boundaries or limitations (3).

I would be hesitant to describe these forms as truly hybrid, expressive of a truly new means of identifying oneself beyond established categories, since these forms still exhibit clear references to two distinct styles or moments that are blended to create a new object or form, but in which these traces are still clearly readable. Moreover, any rejoicing over the 'death of kitsch' has to face the fact that, with the post-1994 rise of 'Rainbow Romanticism', kitsch is far from dead.

Rainbow Romanticism

In the context of Bhabha's conception of the third space, the Rainbow Nation can be considered a very kitsch idea in itself, as it keeps different racial groups separate – like the colours of the rainbow, each designated its specific place within the overall ensemble.

In this sense, the following pair of Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk salt and pepper shakers is probably the epitome of Rainbow Romanticist kitsch [Fig 5.21]. Presenting 'white' and 'black' as literally going together like 'salt' and 'pepper' offers the fantasy of multiculturalism – where each racial group is assigned to its own, specific, intrinsic place that does not interfere with the place of the other, but that can operate in tandem for the ultimate effect. This type of essentialism is underlined in crude colour-coding displayed in the choice of F.W. de Klerk for the salt pot and Nelson Mandela for the pepper, matching the skin-colour of each to the spice to which they are assigned.

Figure 5.21 Rainbow nation salt and pepper shakers

Furthermore, this approach is also clearly expressed in a number of advertisements that have increasingly seen the light since 1994. Advertisements steeped in 'Rainbow Romanticism' make use of a group of people that contains a representative for each of the racial groups. Thus, a little white girl, a little black girl, a little coloured girl, and a little Indian girl crowd together for the purpose of advertising a certain product. Or a white man, a black man, a coloured man, and an Indian man concur that X is the best beer. Alternately, a white mother, a black mother, a coloured mother, and an Indian mother agree, after their (respectively white, black, coloured, and Indian) sons' soccer game, that Y is indeed the best washing-powder for removing the stains from their soccer clothes.

One could argue that these types of advertisements involve an attempt to naturalise the integration of the various racial groups after the falling away of apartheid legislation, which prevented such interaction, thus aiding in the processes of nation-building post-1994. They can, however, also be critiqued from the point of view of Bhabha's distinction between cultural *diversity* and cultural *difference*:

> Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism it gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity. (Bhabha 50)

Seen from perspective of the discourse of cultural diversity, each of these cultural or racial groupings can exist side by side, locked in their own practices and material realities, from which they occasionally step in order to engage for a brief while around a common purpose – in this context, the product being advertised. It glosses over the actual historical and material realities that underlie such divisions, which prevent individuals from such effortless assimilation, and poses no answers as to how these divisions should be resolved. Rather, by representing peaceful coexistence, it harks back to the apartheid practice of 'separate development'.

As opposed to cultural diversity, cultural difference draws attention to the fact that cultural authority (in the sense of referring to a stable set of practices as the locus of identification) is inherently ambivalent. This Bhabha locates within "the structure of symbolic representation itself" (52). According to him, it is "this difference in the process of language that is crucial to the production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never mimetic and transparent" (52).

Bhabha sees this linguistic difference dramatized in the usual semiotic account of the "juncture between the subject of a proposition (*énoncé*) and the subject of enunciation" (53). The latter cannot be represented in the statement, but is

> the acknowledgement of its discursive embeddedness and address, its cultural positionality, its reference to a present time and a specific space. The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it can not 'in itself' be conscious. (53)

Thus, when considering that "all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation", it becomes clear that all "hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity" (55). Accordingly, as opposed to the notion of cultural diversity – in which the notion of 'equal, but different' which could easily lapse into the Orwellian 'equal but better' – the notion of cultural difference rules out such assumptions to begin with. The notion of the 'Third Space' refers to the existence of cultural identities beyond the mere combining of essences suggested above.

Madiba Kitsch

Talk of post-apartheid kitsch would be incomplete without a discussion of 'Madiba kitsch', which could indeed be considered a sub-category of post-apartheid kitsch in itself. Under this grouping, there are enough knick-knacks in the likeness of the first democratically elected South African president to allow for the discussion of additional sub-categories of Madiba kitsch!

This is a predicament that a recent investigation by the BBC traces back to the early 1990s, to the day of Mandela's inauguration. Hawkers were selling coffee cups with Mandela's smile on their surfaces, as is usual for the inauguration of a new president. Clearly, these were tremendously popular, however, and soon "a host of chancers were cashing in (O'Toole par. 14).

The first type of Madiba kitsch, like those mentioned above, thus presents the image of Nelson Mandela as a sign of heritage, as a national symbol, such as the following painting [Fig. 5.22]. In the painter's catalogue, it is featured in the 'patriotism' section, alongside zebras at dusk, and leopards lazing in trees. The portrait depicts the Madiba in one of his iconic shirts. The background consists of Khoi San drawings, which the artist describes as the "heritage of the indigenous people of the Eastern Cape, Nelson's birthplace" (Bell, par. 1). Also, it includes the following images:

> mountain ranges, indigenous Aloe plant, rock paintings, young warrior initiates and the cultural rural villages. The traditional elders and the East Cape coastline are also depicted – all ghosted as Mandela's lifetime into the mud plaster technique used to build their huts (par. 1).

By juxtaposing these elements that can stand metonymically for 'South Africa', the overall effect – and this is a characteristic it shares with other types of Madiba 'heritage kitsch' – is that the image of Mandela is reduced to that of a 'theme' or an 'essence'. In other words, Madiba becomes interchangeable with other elements that signify a quintessentially South African heritage. This is underlined in the particular ensemble being considered, which is rounded off by a frame made of copper and iron, that

Figure 5.22 Madiba kitsch

supposedly resembles "traditional Xhosa implements" (par. 1).

Moving away from a purely South African context to an international one, the second category is objects using the former president's image that are produced purely for commercial reasons. This refers to the unscrupulous efforts of a number of traders in their attempts to make money out of Madiba's image, on anything from badge to fridge magnets (O'Toole par. 2). Mandela, famous for his colourful shirts, will currently find that his visage has been absorbed by the world of fashion, printed on clothes such as in the images displayed in the collage on the following page [Fig. 5.23a-f].

Although the image of Mandela is protected by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF), things have deteriorated so badly that the NMF's legal representatives have had to apply for trademark registration over not only "the names Nelson Mandela, Madiba (his clan name), and Rolihlahla (his given name)," but also Mandela's celebrated prison number, 46664 (par. 4). Theoretically speaking, this should protect a person against being unlawfully misappropriated, but this is not the case in practice, as suggested by the images below. In spite of these measures, "the NMF is still inundated with requests by entrepreneurs seeking Mandela's endorsement for everything from special issue pens, Madiba diamonds, to books bearing his name" (par. 6).

It is estimated by the BBC that, if Mandela were a commercial entity, "it is believed he could be ranked alongside Coca-Cola and Microsoft. According to Interbrand Corporation's latest table of the world's most valuable brands, Coca Cola is worth $67,000m" (par. 12-13). Commercialization of the Madiba image in the manner described above is corrosive to historical awareness and political sensitivity, as it reduces the person of Nelson Mandela to a signifier that, like the image of Che Guevara, can be sold as 'revolutionary chic'.

The extent to which Madiba has also come to be regarded as a 'metonym for Africa' is illustrated in the following incident. The owner of the *Madiba* restaurant in London decided to change its name after receiving a phone-call from Madiba's legal representatives imploring him to do so (virtualtourist.com, par. 1). He changed it to

5.23 a-f) A litany of Madiba kitsch

Chakalaka! – where one can still "eat traditional South African food whilst listening to traditional South African music, with wildlife paintings on the wall" (par. 2). This illustrates the extent to which 'Madiba' is drawn upon to characterize something as quintessentially South African as, let's say, chakalaka, castle lager, or the zebra print pattern with which the exterior of the restaurant had been painted [Fig 5.24].

Figure 5.24 ***Chakalaka!***

In addition to serving as a mere 'metonym for Africa', one also has to consider the latter in terms of the place South Africa occupies in the global consciousness post-1994. As stated by Mbembe, it is that of a space in which the ideal of multicultural integration is effected, and, as such, serves as a space of desire for the rest of the world, especially Western countries increasingly confronted with the issues of multiculturalism in the face of globalization.[48]

This becomes particularly significant if one considers the current status of African independence in the global imaginary. Once a source of euphoria, African independence is now regarded "as dated, belonging to history… an object of our collective memory, a pure source of nostalgia that only comes to life in a museum or gallery space" (Diawara, 17). As such, it is "reduced to celebration, kitsch and Afro-pessimism", particularly in the light of the violence and corruption of many of the post-independence regimes (17). Seen

[48]Keynote address. University of Stellenbosch, 2008.

in this light, South Africa occupies a privileged space in the global imaginary due to the fact that it seems to have succeeded where many other postcolonial states have failed.

Moreover, these images hint at what Enwezor has described as the desire for the "domestication of Post-colonial subjects" (qtd. in Diawara 8). Emptied of all content, these symbolize an 'otherness' that is easy to consume and effortless to assimilate, going nicely with the cosmopolitan ideal of the West – one that it can embrace with the least possible disturbance to itself. These kitsch images therefore participate in a cycle of repetition and negation, in which all racial and national politics become emptied out in order to present this as an enjoyable image of multiracial cosmopolitanism to the West, increasingly confronted with the influx of racially other immigrants from its former colonies (21).

The above-mentioned becomes significant when turning to an interpretation of the following image. During the 2004 celebrations of South Africa's 10 years of democracy, the Belgians decided to confer the dubious honour upon former president Nelson Mandela of dressing their famous little statue Manneken Pis in his likeness for the occasion, by means of a small grey Afro wig and a small-scale replica of the Madiba shirt [Fig. 5.25]. It is an established practice to dress the statue in costumes on special occasions, and over the years a wardrobe has been collected, comprising "several hundreds of different of different costumes" (par. 4).[49]

Figure 5.25 The dubious honour of having the Manneken Piss dress in his likeness.

[49]http://www.cherryflava.com/cherryflava/2004/04/index.html (28 April 2004)

Concluding notes

An overview of post-apartheid kitsch makes it clear that despite the original use of recycled kitsch, kitsch is far from dead, as is clear from the alarming output of kitsch steeped in Rainbow Romanticism. Furthermore, the line between complicity and subversion in the use of kitsch for social commentary is often very thin. This observation is particularly pertinent in the light of a resurfacing of these same images of 'boerekitsch' over the last few years, in a way that is anything but ironically intended.

Van der Vyver's earlier remark that kitsch serve as a battlefield for social meanings has only become all the more relevant over the last few years. Consider, for example, the following image of a young black man in a t-shirt with the old South African flag and the words "100% Boer" written upon it [Fig. 5.26]. On the one hand, this is a subversion. But it appeared on the internet shortly after the very real instance of the resurgence of the '*oranje-blanje-blou*' being printed on t-shirts and sold widely at arts festivals all over the country. Thus, as opposed to the recycling of kitsch images discussed earlier, there was virtually no time-lapse between the two events. This sets them apart from the bulk of the images discussed earlier, as this example does not involve the re-evaluation of past assumptions, but rivalling definitions of the present.

Figure 5.26 "100% Boer"

Another instance of the revival of the old South African flag was observed by Enwesor, for whom it represents the persistent dream of the return of the old nation. He sees it as a nostalgic relic, cleansed of unpleasant memories (371). Yet, he comments:

> Nostalgia, cleansed of poisonous memories, endures, and is thus justified in its almost fatalistic clinging to a relic of racism. In many ways, this defiant use of an old nationalist symbol, with its undisguised, terrifying history, is nothing new or unique. It has companions in the recent Fascist revivalism that has engulfed Europe in the aftermath of the Cold War, with the return of swastika and Nazi symbolism, and in a more enduring history of the Confederacy flag in the southern United States". (371)

In the past three years, this type of far-right iconoclasm has increased. It featured most notably in the De La Rey debacle, which raged towards the end of 2006 and early 2007. The source of the controversy was a song performed by the local musician Bok van Blerk about the Boer War hero, in which the refrain pleads with De La Rey to come back to 'free' and 'lead' the Boers. The use of images from the Anglo Boer war in not only the lyrics, but also the music video, is an excellent example of the resurfacing of post-1994 'boerekitsch', which is used in a manner that illustrates the growing anxieties of the white Afrikaans minority over their dwindling political and cultural status, and thus not intended to be self-effacing in any way. Sontag's statement about Camp, "it's good *because* it's awful", can also be applied to much ironically intended kitsch. Nevertheless, she says "[o]f course, one can't always say that" (292). This is certainly the case in the example mentioned above – an instance in which this criteria does not apply.

As stated by Koos Kombuis in the afterword to Hopkins' *Voëlvry*:

> all is not well within Afrikanerdom, and in South Africa as a whole…. Afrikaners of all ages are once more retreating back into the laager. It pains me to say that I have never sensed so much racism, in my own tribe and across the board, as now. We are once again in a very similar situation as that which existed at the time of the tour. Polarization, repression, poverty and disease are spreading unchecked through the land. (141)

As described by Enwezor upon observing a neighbour hoisting the old South African flag, he was fascinated by the "rituality of this forlorn hope" (371). In this sense, "[t]he flag is an ideological prop of longing, the lost dream of a fallen nation whose haunted past is very much part of the present, a sentinel that echoes the ambivalence of the desires of both the new South African nation and the fantasy of time fading fast with the bleached tricolor of the old flag" (371).

Yet, as put by Evita Bezuidenhout, the self-proclaimed holder of "the greatest collection of 'boerekitsch' in the world," her nauseum allows "everyone… a chance to laugh and/or cry, then remember and celebrate that we are no longer there. Tannie believes that by acknowledging where we come from, we will understand where we are going" (Evita.co.za, par. 1). I believe that Tannie Evita's optimism is not unfounded, as I regard notions such as the construction of the kitsch myth – as well as matters surrounding the concepts of 'the fake' and 'the authentic' – as particularly relevant in the negotiation of contemporary identities in a South African setting.

Moreover, the practice of reinterpreting kitsch, as far as discourses of representation are concerned, can be part of what Mbembe refers to as the developing of a certain practice of reading. This he refers to as an "aesthetic of opening and encounter" (127). The latter refers to "fragmentary encounters" in disciplines and fields of knowledge that may not fall with in the social sciences, strictly speaking. It is a technique of reading that focuses on the "archives of the present," including not only the formal discourses of academics, "but also visual, sung, painted, and narrated texts", as these texts "form part of the memory of [societies]" (371). And reading them, Bhabha continues, involves grappling with the "power of falsification that lies at the heart of the memory of yesterday and today" (127). These memories, therefore, even memories (or 'traces', then) of kitsch represent the experience which many contemporary South Africans have of power (127).

In this sense, I therefore regard kitsch as an important 'text' outside the confines of any discipline, strictly speaking, which nevertheless forms a large part of South African popular memory. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, many of these 'memories' or

traditions are indeed invented or 'falsified'. An interrogation of the way in which these are fabricated is essential, therefore, as it also comes to bear on the way in which myths of nationalism are being constructed in the present. In this sense, creating a critical register from which to consider kitsch can play a crucial part in the negotiation of an aesthetics of 'opening up'.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The initial premise of this thesis was the contestation of kitsch as a specific moment within, or aspect of, modernity. This has been achieved, in part, by introducing the areas where the contradictions inherent in modernity loom large, particularly with regard to the notions of the modern myth and modern nostalgia. The thesis has also examined the manner in which the assumptions underlying modernity, as embedded in kitsch, are renegotiated within a 'postmodern' cultural moment, through the practice of 'recycling kitsch' and Retro. The aim of this thesis, however, has not only been to unpack the characteristics of kitsch as a typically modern phenomena, but also to 'place' these in a manner that challenges the notion of modernity as a singular, universally unfolding narrative that can be interpreted within a similar frame and yield similar results across diverse geographical locations. In order to emphasize the latter, the manner in which these 'aspects' of modernity are negotiated within the South African context in particular have been highlighted, as an example of the unfolding of one of modernity's many 'geographies.'

This has been done by focusing on the types of kitsch produced in the course of local political struggles, in order to gain an adequate sense, as specified by Diouf, of the two areas of investigation that an enquiry into colonial modernities entails: one, the course, or trajectory of modernity in a local context, and, two, the place assigned to individuals within these 'modernities' (par. 1). In doing so, as argued by Foster, attention has been drawn to the manner in which:

> [m]odernity's geographies are… made in relationship between places and across spaces… This has tended to be understood as the 'exportation' of modernity from the centre to the periphery, both for the metropole and the empire, and for the city and the country. This conceptualization, however, [has ignored] the crucial ways in which these

> geographies of connection are moments in the making of modernities, rather than their being matters of imposition. (304)

Having presented kitsch as a typical product of modernity in Chapter Two, it was subsequently demonstrated that local articulations of kitsch – such as the manifestations of the modern myth in the kitsch of Afrikaner Nationalism, as well as the negotiation of the 'authentic' notion of modern nostalgia in the kitsch intended for the Afrikaner home – are all instances of the 'making' of a typically local modernity, as opposed to the direct 'transfer or imposition' of these concepts from the metropoles of the West[50].

In addition, a substantial component of this thesis has been devoted to the manner in which a kitsch object can be 'redeemed' in order to assign a new meaning to the object in question. As demonstrated in the course of this thesis, it is indeed possible for the meaning of kitsch objects to change from one context to the next, or even for kitsch to be vested with new meaning. When concerned with modernity as a notion that constantly depends on the negotiation of the meaning of the past within the present, and of postmodernism as a reevaluation of the assumptions of modernity, this is indeed an important point to consider. This also indicates, however, a characteristic instability inherent in endowing all objects with value. As explored in the closing stages of Chapter Five, as noted by Bhabha, the very structure of symbolic representation renders all such cultural statements and systems inherently contradictory and ambivalent.

It is exactly this point of connection between kitsch and its attempts to foreclose meaning, as well as the Enlightenment's tendency towards the universal, that has been at the basis of my enquiry. Up to point, this has been discussed quite broadly, with various characteristics and manifestations of kitsch discussed, and meriting various chapters. But now that all these examples have been laid on the table, I will draw on these insights so as to provide an overview, drawing my argumentative net even closer. For this, I will stand still once more at the kind of 'life' objects have within modernity. The latter

[50]It has to be noted that this enquiry into the making of modernity in a local context has focused by and large on its cultural ramifications.

becomes important if one is concerned with the political potential of recasting the meaning of these supposedly 'kitsch' objects.

Modernity and the life of objects

As stated earlier, kitsch is a problematic analytical category within the domain of modern aesthetics. Chapter Two elaborated how the category of 'kitsch' is constructed in dialogue with the notion of the unique 'art object', which is positioned as its binary opposite. This opposition was demonstrated to be the result of the problem that, as changes in the relations of production increasingly allowed for the relatively easy and affordable reproduction of works of art, so the values of 'uniqueness' and 'authenticity' associated with the original work of art seemed increasingly threatened by the practices of mechanical reproduction. This problematic of assessing works of art within a context that seems to render these traditional values obsolete is handled in the work of Benjamin, where he speaks of the decline of the 'aura' of the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction.

Benjamin attributes the qualities of uniqueness to the art object, which above all refers to its unique presence in time and space (220). Moreover, this supposed unity of the object determines "the history to which it is subject throughout the time of its existence", which includes signs of its physical deterioration and changes in ownership that may come to mark it over the years (220). Thus, above all, the 'unique art object' assumes a unity in time and space that persists over time, which is located beyond the reach of technical reproducibility (220). This he refers to as the object's 'aura'.

For our purposes, however, closer examination of this notion of the aura's persistence over time and space points towards a characteristic instability inherent in endowing objects with value, and is inherent within the order of signification itself, rendering problematic the privileging of the unique art object. This is also the basis of Eagleton's critique of Benjamin's notion of the aura. He proposes that, when concerned with the so-called 'life of objects', it is important to include in the notion of the aura the concept of

the ‘trace’ (32). If, in one sense, the ‘trace’ relates to the aura and its perceived endurance, it also stands directly opposed to it. For, in addition, the ‘trace’ refers to those elements of the production process, or the web of social relations in which the object stands embedded, that cling to it in its passing from one hand to the other, and thus helps “to defetishize it” (32). As Eagleton explains:

> [T]he trace is… what marks the object’s historicity, the scars it has accumulated at the hands of various users, the visible imprint of its variable functions. The traces inscribed on an object’s body are the web that undoes its self-identity, the mesh of consumptional modes in which it has been variously caught. The erasure, preservation, or revival of traces then, is a political practice that depends upon the nature of the traces and contexts in question: the object may be treated as palimpsest, its existent traces expunged by an overwriting, or it may secrete blurred traces that can be productively retrieved. (32)

As described in Chapter Three, the construction of the iconography of Afrikaner nationalism – dependent on images such as the ‘heroic ancestry’ of the Voortrekkers and the invented traditions and mythologies that accompanied this reconstructed version of the *Great Trek* – comprised a version of the past constructed by the erasure of some traces in order to preserve those most appropriate to these ideological ends. As powerfully demonstrated in the example of the Afrikaners’ anxiety about their rural roots, in the negotiation of their modern political identity, as discussed in Chapter Four, the ambivalent traces of the Afrikaners as a ‘creole underclass’ of ‘poor subsistence farmers’ had to be rewritten in terms of the history of a heroic people, which legitimised their claims to political power. Moreover, this entailed the constant ‘rewriting’ of the history of various cultural artefacts. Importantly, however, as demonstrated in the course of this thesis, and with specific reference to the ‘recycled boerekitsch’ discussed in Chapter Five, these ‘suppressed’ traces can be ‘productively retrieved’ and applied to alternative political ends. The ‘trajectory’ of kitsch in a local context, described in the course of these chapters, thus demonstrates the various political applications of these traces, and serves as a potent example of Eagleton’s statement that the negotiation of traces is a political practice, dependent on ‘the nature of the traces and contexts in question’.

More than just the mere external "rubbing and scrubbing of surfaces", however, what is at issue here is the "recognition that all objects are *written* in their deepest being, internally constituted by the changing script of their social relations, which never adds up to a fully coherent text" (32). Objects, like human subjects, are therefore "'written' before they 'speak', a fact, in both cases, which accounts for their crisis-ridden history" (32).

Before assuming its place within Lacan's symbolic order, the human subject is "already scored over by a network of unconscious signifiers" (32). Thus, the subject finds itself painfully divided "between its allotted place and its subversive desire" (32). It is "the Law or 'Name of the Father,' which joins the subject to that place under threat of castration, at the same stroke opening up the unconscious, [that] is in a sense operative also in the history of objects and artefacts" (32).

To recall Benjamin's use of the term "aura", or "authenticity", this supposedly designates "the object's persistence in its originary mode of being, its carving out of an organic identity for itself over time", but also "the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (qtd. in 32). Yet, Eagleton comments:

> we know that such persistence of the origin is an ideological delusion. The statue of Venus venerated by the ancient Romans is only for the chemist the 'same' statue denounced as idolatry by medieval clerics. Mechanical reproduction – which may figure here for a metonym for cultural revolution – destroys the authority of origins, but in doing so writes large a plurality that was there all along. It signifies the invasion of multiplicity into the object, shattering that illusory self-identity (33).

This, Eagleton maintains, one "might risk calling the object's ego", as he compares the object to the psychoanalytic subject, who is able to "designate itself as a homogenous entity over time by repressing the traces of its unconscious desires" (33). Thus, "the auratic object, whether cultural artifact or state apparatus, continually rewrites its own history in order to expel traces of its ruptured, heterogeneous past" (33). "The political task of liberating the object then", for Eagleton, "takes the form of opening up its

unconscious – detecting within it those chips of heterogeneity that it has been unable quite to dissolve" (33). For "[e]ven though chronology places regularity above permanence, it cannot prevent heterogeneous, conspicuous fragments from remaining within it" (33).

The attempt to suppress these 'heterogeneous chips' which can never quite be dissolved, is also what is glaringly obvious in kitsch – what actually makes kitsch *kitsch*; what Scruton refers to as prompting "that half-physical revulsion – the 'yuk!' feeling – that is our spontaneous tribute to kitsch in all its forms" (par. 4). In this sense, what Hopkins observed in relation to 'boerekitsch' – that it was so terrible, it paved the way for its own downfall – can be said to hold true for all kitsch. Hopkins maintains that 'boerekitsch', those "hundreds of thousands of objects and trinkets glorifying Boer history [that] flooded the market, and found their way into homes across the land" for the forty years following the 1938 centenary, instead of supporting the myth it sought to instil, "left such aesthetic scars that they became objects of derision – thus sowing the seeds for a decline in values and the ultimate destruction of the dream they aspired to create" (*Struikbooks.co.za* par. 1). As with the example of the house beautiful discussed earlier, which points towards the 'aesthetic and sociological limits of kitsch', the very attempt to preserve this illusion of country living in an urban environment is what exposes this dream as false. Thus, like the psychoanalytic subject, the kitsch object assumes its 'illusionary self-identity' by suppressing its heterogeneous 'unconscious' – but like the Lacanian Law or 'Name of the Father', this is at the same time what opens up its 'unconscious', the existence of which is what kitsch perversely tries to deny.

It is therefore clear that the 'traces' of an object are not to be confused with something that can simply "easily be wiped clean" (33). Rather, to use Benjamin's own comparison, as opposed to the slime of a snail, the trace is rather to be regarded as that very snail's "fossilized imprint in a rock" (qtd. in Eagleton 34).

> It can conspire, in other words, with that now fashionable epistemological 'constructivism' for which the object – since we have all agreed to abolish the *Ding-an-*

> *sich* – can seem pure possibility in the hands of the subject, offering not the slightest resistance to the subject's designs upon it. Properly understood, 'trace' reminds us among other things of exactly that resistance to reconstruction which is a sign of the object's materiality, and of the fact that it is not just anybody's ideological dupe. It reminds us that the business of erasing, preserving or rewriting traces is always one of political struggle, a struggle in which the object is no mere paper tiger (34).

It is denial of this obvious materiality to which kitsch above all else owes its "characteristic falseness", described by Calinescu in Chapter Two, and which earns it the epithet of being an "aesthetic form of lying" (229). The recalcitrance of the object's materiality moreover leads us to reconsider the notion of the aura's enduring authenticity (32). Considering the object in terms of the traces that cling to it, the aura (as supposedly free of these) begins to resemble the "quintessence of the homogenous time of historicism, from which all rupture has been eradicated" (Eagleton 41). More importantly, as it must suppress all ruptures, it inevitably must also do away with death (41).

Such a vision of a past emptied of all disturbances seems to coincide with Lacan's definition of the imaginary. As explained in Chapter Two, the imaginary is unable to accommodate death, and therefore, as put by Eagleton, it must "resist the traumatic moment in which, confronted with lack and difference", the subject realises that it can indeed die, as the world does not depend on its existence (41). As kitsch can in many ways be regarded as an attempt to escape this intrusion of the Real, I will dwell briefly on this notion of the imaginary in order to extend fully the parallel between the psychoanalytic subject and the 'lives of objects'.

In the Lacanian sense, an imaginary object is one which reinforces the subject's "illusory self-identity by ceaselessly reflecting back to it an image that is at once itself and another" (37). "This imaginary interchange", Eagleton comments, is mainly visual. When looking at someone, there is the "implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze" (Eagleton, 37). Yet, Lacan maintains that

> the enclosure of two lovers' looks is always fractured by this lack: the fact that I can never look at her from the place she sees me. The 'symbolic' – the possibility of alternative subject-positions, contrary articulations – enters the imaginary to disrupt it from within. Once the field of vision is thus robbed of its imaginary unity by the gaze of the other, it becomes *libidinally* cathected: it is now configured around a lack which deprives the insatiable look satisfaction (qtd. in Eagleton 38).

The auratic object is thus one which ultimately 'returns' one's gaze. Eagleton cites the Lacanian notion of "the 'pacifying Apollonian effect of painting" – the object's effort "to tame the greedily libidinal gaze" by presenting itself as a suitable partner (38). The work of art should therefore be recognized in that it mirrors to us "that of which our eyes could never have their fill" (39). The reason for this is because that which fulfills the desire, is also exactly the very same thing "on which the desire continually feeds" (39). Thus, Eagleton recognizes that "the condition idealized as infinite plenitude is better described as infinite lack of desire" (39). The reason why the work of art cannot exhaust our gaze is because desire can never really be fulfilled. Therefore, the "the deeper the remoteness the glance has to overcome, the stronger the spell that is apt to emanate from the gaze", thereby disguising the actual claustrophobia of the imaginary (39).

Accordingly, the aura inhabits the imaginary, as it pretends to meet the subject's desire. The "intimacy" offered by the reproduced object differs, however. In as far as the imaginary involves the elimination of death, as far as the commodity is concerned, this is handled in a contradictory manner. As figured forth in Freud's *Beyond the pleasure principle*, death represents the longing to return to the "quiescence of the inorganic world" (qtd. in 34). In other words, death can be considered to be "the ultimate aura", in which the living being can "at last discover refuge" from the disturbances of the material world (34).

The commodity therefore contains the "absence of death in a double erasure: its erasure, but also its sinister blankness" (35). As observed by Eagleton, it must remove the threat of death, yet retain the allure of a state that is without disturbance, one that is (paradoxically) also "death-like". Furthermore, this is a characteristic that it shares with

kitsch. As stated with reference to kitsch and escapism, kitsch must continually toe the line between escapism and conformism: it must assure the subject of their being safely contained within the imaginary – a "flight from death" – but as this is of course not a real escape, it depends on endless repetition, a dulling regurgitation of regurgitations. As Bloch rightly comments, it has to be noted that an "escape of death is not necessarily the same as overcoming death" (75). He sees the kitsch object's supposed evasion of death is nothing more than an attempt to overcome time by transforming it into a "simultaneous system" (75). But, as kitsch cannot overcome time, its escape from death must be "anxiously repeated" (75).

Kitsch, like the commodity, must therefore constantly 'suppress difference beneath repetition'. As mentioned with reference to 'boerekitsch' and the house beautiful, the kitsch object offers the viewer or potential buyer an escape from reality (or as in the case of the political kitsch discussed, a particularly attractive version of reality), but this "emptying out" of reality is also what prompts what Scruton claims to be an "instinctive revulsion" to kitsch. To deepen this earlier observation that the very fact that kitsch is so 'terrible' is what supposedly paves the way for its own inevitable downfall; as Eagleton reminds us, "the object that seeks to seduce us back to the narcissism of the imaginary cannot but remind us in that very act that our gaze is 'castrated', a function of that unassuageble desire set in motion by the 'shock' of our first encounter with absence, difference and death in entering the symbolic order" (39).

By attempting to lure the subject back into the imaginary, kitsch thereby highlights the fact that we are, inevitably, expelled from it. The above formulation thus appears to lend credibility to the definition of kitsch as a 'symptom' – in that in trying to mask something, it highlights the very fact of its actual existence. Finally, this is then also in support of the contention of kitsch being a 'symptom of modernity', as indeed the place where all the contradictions inherent in modernity are writ large (as demonstrated in the course of this dissertation).

Kitsch: Where the contradictions inherent within modernity looms large

The notion of kitsch as a 'symptom' of modernity suggests that there are certain contradictions inherent in the very notion of the Enlightenment. This idea that the Enlightenment is dialectically capable of producing its other was introduced by Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the wake of the destruction wrought by WWII, they set out to explain how the apparently 'enlightened' world of Western Europe had managed to descend into such barbarism and devastation. Indeed, modernity, for much of Western Europe, appeared to have culminated in the very opposite of what it had set out to achieve. The concept that the failings of the Enlightenment's ideal of freedom and equal rights are exemplified in the "great crimes and revolutions" of the twentieth century is echoed by Scruton, who also observes that these often took place "behind a veil of kitsch" (par. 21). He continues:

> look at the art and propaganda of Nazi Germany and revolutionary Russia, and you will see the unmistakable sign of it – the gross sentimentality, the mechanical clichés, and the constant pretense at a higher life and a noble vision that can be attained just like that, merely by putting on a uniform". (par. 21)

When considering this so-called "kitsch with teeth" (par. 21), Chapter Three has demonstrated the extent to which the latter is often steeped in myth – or indeed in 'modern myth' – in order to sustain its ideological claims. More significantly, though, the modern myth exemplifies the reversion to irrationality at heart of Enlightenment. As put by Adorno and Horkheimer, Enlightenment was from the beginning deeply invested in mythology – which it aimed to dispel and "overthrow fantasy with knowledge" in order to "liberate human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (1). From the outset, however, Enlightenment was rooted in that same irrational fear of the unknown that gave rise to mythology in the first place (1). In this sense, Adorno and Horkheimer observe that the Enlightenment is steeped in myth, and that myth is already enlightenment, "as the myths which fell victim to Enlightenment were already its products" (5):

> Mythology itself set in motion the endless process of enlightenment by which, with ineluctable necessity, every definitive theoretical view is subjected to the annihilating criticism that it is only a belief, until even the concepts of mind, truth, and, indeed, enlightenment itself have been reduced to animistic magic. (7)

Whereas the myth still sought to "narrate, record and explain" phenomena, however, the Enlightenment does away with meaning. Modern science increasingly eschews the notion of "things-in-themselves", as the "concept is replaced by the formula, the cause by rules and probability" (3). Guided by utility, the world is reduced to that which can be contained within the scientific formula. By doing so, the Enlightenment, according to the authors, retreats deeper and deeper into irrationality.

Dorfles agrees that the kitsch myth has contact with the irrational (48). This mythogogic tendency within modernity thus displays the persistence of irrational elements in the apparently scientific, positivistic, rationally progressive forward thrust of Enlightenment. Moreover, as this irrationality is rooted in a fear of the unknown, this can ultimately be brought back to a fear of death. Yet, as demonstrated earlier, this fear of death points towards a longing to be safely contained within the imaginary, safe from the intrusion of the real. As stated by Bloch, however, since death cannot be overcome, an escape of death depends on anxious repetition (76), or, put differently, in the Enlightenment's attempt to reduce the world to the sign depends on a series of radical foreclosures.

The above-mentioned becomes especially important when considering the notion of modern nostalgia. In this sense, Eagleton's interpretation of Benjamin's notion of the aura proves to be particularly relevant, in as much as it draws attention to the fact that the object, like the human subject, when considered from a psychoanalytical perspective, is never a self-identical, homogenous entity, but can come to assume various contingent meanings. This is moreover a characteristic it shares with the linguistic sign. A brief elaboration of this presently fashionable theme of the "non-coincidence of the signification and being", evident in Foucault's assertion that "[m]an and language can never be coterminous", and in Lacan's "reflections on the fading of the subject in

language" (qtd. in Eagleton 35), will thus be included here as this is of significance as far as the following is concerned.

Considering again the notion of modern nostalgia, that longing for a 'lost home' and to return wistfully to the past, in the metaphysical sense, does this not represent a yearning for "a time when the intellect was at the tip of the senses", and in which the idealised "social relations of exploited farm labourers constitute[s] a 'right and inevitable human environment'" (7)? Indeed, asks Eagleton:

> what is the metaphysical conceit but the organic society in miniature, a *Gemeinschaft* of the senses and intellect, a transfiguring flash, in which the material is rescued from its facticity and offered up to the ephemeral embrace of the spirit? (7)

The longing for a 'lost home' is therefore also to be regarded as a hankering after being safely 'at home' in the symbolic, without the intrusion of the Real that drives the Enlightenment, as described above. It is exactly this disenchanted modern milieu, emptied out of any remnants of an animistic world-view, however, that is paradoxically what gives rise to this yearning for a supposed lost union between word and thing, self and world. The Enlightenment emancipation of man from a primitive state of dependence on nature thus had the contradictory effect of making modern man feel alienated from the world.

To return to the hearkening back to the imaginary that this ultimately entails, reading the object in terms of the imaginary also has implications for Benjamin's specific approach to history, when it comes the manner in which it is possible for the meaning of objects to change from one context to the next. This becomes important when considering how these contradictions inherent within modernity become reworked from a postmodern point of view.

Benjamin's specific approach to history

The imaginary operates via hiding difference beneath repetition. In doing so, it simulates the experience of the aura, by suggesting an essence which endures beyond the material changes that every object is necessarily subjected to. This is also a contradiction, Benjamin claims, that lays at the very center of the dialectical or utopian image, which "in searching out for the new always finds itself rapidly regressing, prefiguring the future in the idiom of the archaic" (qtd. in Eagleton 35).

As laid out above, the aura can be said to "inhabit the imaginary", where it binds "subject and object in a clausteral exchange" (41). In its leveling out of all things as equivalent to each other, even its own history is condemned as a "mere repetition of itself" (40). "Origin" and "repetition" are thereby fixed in an imaginary pact: the original moment reduces that which follows to a repetition of itself, and repetition, on the other hand, becomes the "the empty pulsation of a process striving to return to an origin it continually displaces" (40).

Seen in this light, then, the aura seems to belong with myth, "which encodes the passive dependence on nature, and this, in turn is for Benjamin the secret of all ideology" (41). It is therefore clear why the 'ravages' of mechanical reproduction on the aura seemed to Benjamin to present an opening for political critique, as the defetishization of the aura's supposed persistence over time would allow for the present moment to read itself anew. In this sense, Benjamin makes the following distinction. On the one hand, there is the constant hiding of difference beneath repetition, what he regards as the eternal recurrence of myth or ideology, including "modern historicist mythologies of perpetual same" and the "ceaseless differencing which results from smashing the aura and deploying the object in specific conjectures" – in other words, the constant search for novelty in order to signify what is new about modernity (qtd. in 40). On the other hand, as opposed to "fetishizing difference", as described above, dialectical thought, "once released from the frozen correspondence between myth and historicism", must begin to seek out its own series of correspondences across the surface of history, in search of a "shocking

confrontation in which a present moment may re-read itself in the past and allow the past to interpret itself anew in the present" (41).

As Arendt explains, the past holds authority, only insofar it has been "transmitted as tradition", and conversely, insofar as "authority presents itself historically, it becomes tradition" (38). When considering the notion of the trace as "transmissible essence", or "historical testimony", Eagleton notes that, because the latter depends upon on authenticity, the capacity of the object to bear historical witness is also affected once reproduction wears the aura thin (32). Accordingly, Benjamin maintained that in the current, modern milieu, the rupture with tradition and the loss of authority were "irreparable" and that new ways of treating the past therefore had to be discovered (qtd. in Arendt 38).

When concerned, then, with ways in which the relationship between past and present could be renewed, this brings us to Benjamin's specific handling of this relationship. In seeking new ways in which the past could be approached – or in which these 'shocking confrontations' in which the past is allowed to 'interpret itself anew' could be brought about – Benjamin turned to the use of the quotation marks. This he applied in order to indicate that the "transmissibility of the past has been replaced by its citability" (Arendt 38).

In the place of the authority of the past, Benjamin was concerned with the possibility of settling it down in the present, and depriving the latter of its "mindless peace of complacency" (qtd. in 38). For Benjamin, quotation marks had the function of "robbers by the roadside, who make an armed attack and relieve the idler of his convictions" (38). Thus, the modern function Benjamin accords to quotations emerges out of disenchantment with the present – or indeed with modernity – and the desire to demolish it. Hence, he sees their power not as "the strength to preserve, but to cleanse, to tear out of context, to destroy" (39).[51]

[51] Arendt notes the threefold meaning of the Hegelain term which Benjamin uses to indicate 'cancel': "to preserve, to elevate, or to cancel" (254).

The type of collection that Benjamin had in mind therefore displays the dual impulse of "wanting to preserve and wanting to destroy" (39). This is an impulse, Arendt describes as directed by the sense that although everything is subjected to the ravages of time, this might at the same time also entail a process of "crystallization" (51).

On the one hand, the last-mentioned points towards the heterogeneous chips that exist within the object, that can never quite be destroyed, and therefore the recognition of the object as irredeemably material. Yet, on the other hand, it has also been criticized as carrying overtones of Benjamin's idealism and the belief in the existence of an essence that might be retrieved and preserved. As commented by Eagleton, Benjamin's project can be regarded as problematic in so far as it seems to attempt to "restore the possibility of symbolic correspondences while liquidating that world of natural mythology of which such correspondences are part" (41). Such a view can be brought back to a mimetic theory of language: word and thing that were once "magically, instantaneously one", yet now "it is left to allegory, or dialectical thought to forge usable correspondences from shattered pieces" (Habermas qtd. in Eagleton 41).

But, in such a modern, disenchanted milieu, by virtue of its having been rendered arbitrary, the sign might be torn from its "mimetic intimacy with the thing", says Eagleton, yet it has, on the other hand, "been released into a new freedom with which fresh 'iconic' correspondences may be constructed" (41). Thus, for Benjamin, this was also the possibility mechanical reproduction introduced. In rejecting both the unique difference of the aura and the "endless identities of myth" by leveling artifacts, it freed them for specific functions which could compromise the latter (41).

In this sense, Benjamin's impulse to 'tear out of context' seems to show similarities with the ironic use of kitsch discussed in Chapter Five. Scruton has described ironic kitsch as "kitsch in quotation marks" (par. 28). Instead of just producing kitsch inadvertently, Scruton compares setting quotation marks around kitsch to the pincers with which a scientist might lift an "odiferous specimen from its jar" (par. 28). Quotation marks

therefore indicate that ironic kitsch has been produced deliberately, and therefore it is no longer kitsch, but a kind of parody (par. 28).

But, suggests Scruton, it is necessary for us to consider these postmodern quotation marks to determine whether they function as a sign of sophistication, or as a sign of pretence. For the danger here, is that they may become so generalised that they lose the force to create ironic contrasts (par. 30). As opposed to such a form of 'posing as sophistication', the ironic kitsch considered in Chapter Five engages in the political task of liberating the object by opening up its unconscious, as specified by Eagleton. This use of quotations indeed depends upon selecting fragments from the past in order to deprive the present of its 'mindless complacency' – in order to challenge assumptions, as described by Benjamin. When thus concerned with question of kitsch redeemed, these serve as the insertion of fragments from the past into a new context, which ultimately rehabilitates the fixed meanings assigned to it – in order not merely to recuperate these past assumptions and carry them over into the present, but to create a sense of rupture that allows for new perceptions.

The task of 'redeeming' kitsch is therefore premised on the fact that the existence of its 'unconscious'. Yet, this is not so much a characteristic of the kitsch object as of the structure of symbolic signification in itself (Bhabha 53). Bhabha notes that cultural authority is necessarily ambivalent, even the attempt to assert cultural supremacy is "produced only in the moment of differentiation" (51). The very status of culture "as a knowledge of a referential truth" is at stake when considering the notion of the moment of enunciation (51). Accordingly, any cultural text or meaningful system can never be completely "sufficient unto itself", as "the act of cultural enunciation – the *place of utterance* – is crossed by the *differánce* of writing" (51).

This, Bhabha describes, is not so much a function of the anthropological insight that "varying attitudes to symbolic systems" exist within cultures as of the very structure of symbolic representation (53). The presence of difference within symbolization is

moreover essential "to the production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent" (Bhabha 53).

Since enunciating cultural difference renders problematic the opposition between "past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authorative address", it points towards the problem of how, "in the signifying present", it becomes possible for meanings to be "repeated, relocated and translated" (52). Importantly, our sense of the "authority of cultural symbols and icons" is undermined, as well as of "cultural synthesis in general" (52).

Thus, the identity of a culture can rightly be defined as the site of political struggle (52). Viewed as such, it serves as "a possible critique of the positive aesthetic and political values we ascribe to the unity or totality of cultures, especially those that have known long and tyrannical histories of domination and misrecognition", as cultures are "never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other" (52). It is in these gaps that hybridity appears as the translation of cultures from one context to the next. As explained, it is within the existence of this "Third Space" that it becomes possible for individuals to "negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous and intertextual temporality of cultural difference" (55). Similarly, for our purposes, as cultural objects or practices are translated from one context to another, they acquire a host of various uses, and become absorbed in various sets of social relations – as is the case for kitsch objects in a South African context, which have been the focus of this study.

I have therefore focused specifically on the cultural translation and negotiation of modernity within a local context, by making reference to the notion of geomodernities. In short, this refers to the manner in which, as opposed to the supposed epistemological unity in the assumptions underlying the Enlightenment, modernity is not a monolithic discourse, with a single point of origin and a linear development, but is in fact a collection of locally inflected discourses, with various local points of reference, which are mutually constitiutive. In doing so, I hope to have significantly expanded on the political

geography of kitsch objects, by setting them within the 'specifically modern categories of *world trade* and imperialism', as set out in the introduction.

With regard to cultural expressions of modernity and the ways in which these relate to the supposed current context of "postmodernity" or the "postcolonial moment" (and South Africa's position within these), an awareness of modernity in terms of its global concomitants becomes especially pertinent. Diouf, too, stresses the importance of understanding the "different ways in which the 'package' [of modernity] and the numerous realities that it conceals have circulated… in various historical circumstances" (par. 7). According to him, modernity takes on different values, and therefore it is difficult to "make sense of a concept that is so prevalent in everyday conversation and in political, moral, aesthetic, and cultural analyses, and increasingly in the economic realm as well" (par. 7). He explains:

> The questions regarding the genealogy of the concept of modernity and its different forms, from its initial appearance to its commonplace deployment and the subsequent debates about it have provoked numerous examinations of its heuristic value, its effects in terms of status in the narrative and scientific fields, its limits, possibility of application, and the different manipulations that it offers to those who lay claim to it, adapt to it, or reject it. (par. 7)

Diouf therefore stresses its enduring power as a means of "constructing a geography of people, of cultures, of aesthetic forms" (par. 8). In this sense, modernity remains "always different, always debated, as expected, plural and unstable, between, on the one hand, European modernity and its desire to remake the world in its image or according to its dictates, and, on the other hand, the never-ending process of re-writing, reinterpreting, and/ or retreating from other societies" (par. 8).

This study, a reading of South African kitsch, has therefore made a small enquiry into the cultural meanings of modernity. It is therefore by no means exhaustive, being located in only one small dimension thereof.

In conclusion: the fool becomes wise…

This thesis has treated kitsch critically, yet in conclusion, I wish to emphasize that the supposed "horror" of kitsch should not be over-exaggerated. Part of the reason why I chose kitsch to begin with, is that it allowed for an entry into a scholarly debate through the examining of subject matter that was easily accessible and recognizable. As stated by Evita Bezuidenhout, kitsch presents something with which everyone can identify; "an opportunity to laugh and cry, and celebrate that we are no longer there" (par. 1). I therefore agree with Calinescu in his final conclusion that the supposed "dangers of kitsch" should not be exaggerated (352). Not only would this begin to resemble Greenberg's Manichean opposition between good art and bad, but what a tirade against the "dangers of kitsch" or its supposed "aesthetic evil" does not accommodate is the possibility that the "fool might become wise" (352). In trying to mask the inherent paradoxes in modernity, these are exactly what become visible in kitsch. It therefore presents an opportunity for a productive enquiry into modernity, just as much as it might seem complicit with it.

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